

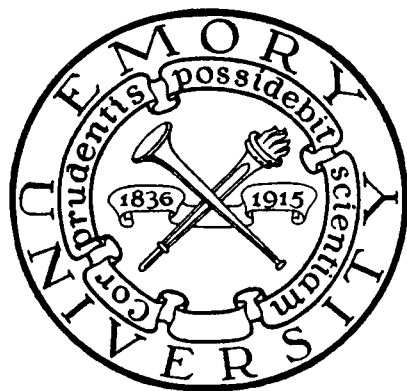
BY THE AUTHOR OF "UNFAIRLY WON"&c

A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK



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A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK

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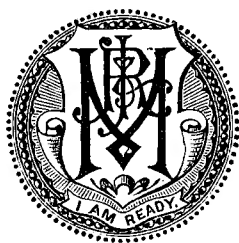
BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK

BY

MRS. POWER O'DONOGHUE

AUTHOR OF

"LADIES ON HORSEBACK," "UNFAIRLY WON,"
"RIDING FOR LADIES," ETC. ETC.



LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

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A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK



CHAPTER I.

MRS. TENTERDEN JONES gave a party. Not a dinner, or yet a dance, but a highly fashionable afternoon "tea," to which the guests came at four and stayed till seven, and at which the entertainment was music, as specified on the cards. Mrs. Tenterden Jones was not the wife of Mr. T. Jones, the fat pork-butcher, who sold bacon and black puddings and delicious-looking fat kitteny sausages, in the same country-town wherein she resided. No; Mrs. Tenterden Jones sold nothing at all, and the bitterest and most difficult pill which she had to swallow was that her husband *did*. He was an apothecary as well as a doctor, and sold drugs and potions in prodigious quantities to the whole country round. His pills, however, were always richly silvered, and made up in neat little boxes, and his patients swallowed them by the score, without any bitterness or difficulty whatever.

To address Mrs. Jones without the Tenterden, was to wound her to the quick. If a patient sent in a hurry for "Dr. Jones," and omitted the important prefix, that gentleman's irate spouse took care—when it lay in her power—to withhold the message for at least half an hour from the time of its delivery, in order that the offending patient might be kept writhing for thirty delicious extra minutes with the colic, toothache, or gout, as the merited punishment of his or her presumption; and when, upon one occasion, an abstracted postman happened to deliver a note addressed "Mrs. T. Jones" at the abode of the pork-butcher—said note being from Mrs. Tenterden Jones's confidential dentist, announcing that her new upper-jaw teeth were quite ready for

“fixing”—the punishments and persecutions which that unhappy postman suffered from suspended Christmas-boxes, complaints at head-quarters, and fiery onslaughts from Mrs. Tenterden Jones’s ill-disposed poodle, were enough to turn the hair of the unfortunate letter-carrier prematurely grey.

As gaiety and admiration were the ruling passions of Mrs. Jones’s life, and as the doctor had money and good-nature in pretty equal proportions, his wife drew liberally upon both, and her parties were lively and frequent, if never particularly select. This especial one was quite an unusual effort. Two dances had preceded it, and Mrs. Tenterden Jones resolved to wind up the season with music and song. The worthy couple were not themselves musically inclined. The lady could just manage to sit out a concert or short opera without going to-sleep, but her spouse never could; and, as he always snored in thirds, his periods formed a serious impediment to the harmony of orchestral performances, and frequently caused the leader to aim surreptitious kicks at the shins of the big bassoon, thinking that that injured individual must certainly be the aggressor. Somebody had, however, told Mrs. Tenterden Jones that a musical tea would be “the thing,” and as there was a lot of talent in the country at that particular time, and a special attraction in the person of a certain magnificent Signor Howlerini—who was on a visit to the sheriff for a week’s recreation, to enjoy the manly pastime of rabbit-shooting—the doctor’s wife acted on the friendly hint, and opened her salons to such of the *élite* as chose to flock thither on that sunshiny April day.

Moppet, the page, had got his jacket turned, and a whole row of new bright buttons affixed to it for the occasion; a local waiter, with a goodly crop of blossoms from the spirit land upon his nose, was engaged to assist; the maid-of-all-work was made melancholy with injunctions to keep out of the way, and, as a proof of obedience, thrust a depressed countenance, disfigured by tears and grime, through the balustrade whenever the spirited male attendant was showing a guest up the narrow staircase.

The drawing-rooms, too, looked quite grand, with the folding-doors thrown wide open between them, and all the chairs in the house arranged in neat rows for the guests to sit upon. Things, indeed, were excellently managed. Wherever Dr. Tenterden Jones had left the mark of his head on chair-back or couch, an antimacassar was skilfully spread. Cruel work the doctor’s pomatum had made of damask and silk—and crewel-work was

made to serve as a covering for it. Wherever the carpet showed signs of wear and tear, rich Persian rugs—or imitations almost as good—were luxuriously laid down. The blinds were carefully drawn, lest too glaring a light should be the means of showing up some other glaring things which were better left in the shade. The old Broadwood pianoforte stood invitingly open at the farthest end of the back room; and the jaws of the poodle—whose name was Beggar—stood open also, as a receptacle for morsels of cake and biscuit, with which the guests in self-defence supplied him, in order to save their garments from the wreckage of his terribly long nails.

The assemblage of company was brilliant in the extreme. There was Mrs. Tenterden Jones herself, with quite four guineas' worth of frizzled fair hair hanging down upon her forehead like an overgrown Lowther Arcade doll, and with a tremendous long train of purple satin streaming out behind, to the intense bewilderment of the wall-eyed curate, who, being short-sighted, mistook it for a portion of the carpet, and was always planted firmly upon it whenever the graceful wearer wanted to move about. There was Dr. Tenterden Jones, very red and fussy, with a deeply rooted aversion to tea-parties, and a bad cold in his head, which kept him busy with his nose for the greater portion of the time. Indeed, that troublesome organ gave him quite as much employment as he could attend to, for whenever, in a fit of politeness, he essayed to address a lady guest, the nose played him a mean trick, and humbled him in the visitor's eyes as well as in his own. It was really too provoking, seeing that he had dined early on roast shoulder of mutton with onion sauce, and had not practised the habits of a total abstainer, for he contrived to give a goodly benefit of the perfume arising from the savoury portion of his dinner to the hapless victim of his attentions, and sneezed cold punch persistently over her, until she groped in desperation for her umbrella, in a state of undefined perplexity with regard to the expediency of putting it up.

Several aunts and uncles, and quite an array of cousins on both sides of the house, were present; and there, too, was Mrs. Tenterden Jones's mamma, smiling and fat, with a brown satin gown, out of which she was manifestly bursting, and a big brown cameo brooch catching together the ends of an extremely diminutive collar, which would insist upon rucking up at the back of her neck, and required constant pinning down by the poor

relation in snuffed-out bombazine. There were the three young Tenterden Joneses, with long plaited hair-tails down their backs, bare necks and legs, and mingled perfumes of stale bread-and-butter and hair oil. These engaging children hovered ominously about the refreshment table, breathed on all the tea-cake, and made audible and occasionally embarrassing remarks upon certain members of the company present.

There was old Mrs. Cruppingham Crump, the M.P.'s wife, the "rankest woman," she said, in the country, who had once sat in company with a juke ! and the retired brevet-major, who had a very large diamond upon his finger, and a very small soul all athirst to display it ; and the pretty Miss Sweetapple, with cheeks precisely like her name ; and opposite to her the three ugly Miss Sourberrys, who could see no beauty about her ; and the mild little man, whose little eyeglass kept perpetually dropping from his eye, down upon the carpet, like a tear—except that he always picked it up again ; and the fierce big man, who swaggered, and cocked his moustaches, and two-thirds of whose language would have been considered improper at a Christian meeting.

There was the Englishman who gave a recitation about Homer, whom he called 'Omer, to the confusion of the curate, who thought he meant Omar Pasha, and, remaining mystified to the end, applauded in all the wrong places, and floored the fierce man by asking whether he, as a professed traveller, could inform him of the whereabouts of the Hilliad, or whether it was a Turkish fortress in which Omar had been confined. There was the Scotchman, who was a known philanthropist : always augmented the Sunday collection in his kirk by placing a three-penny-piece upon the plate, never gave copper to a beggar in the street—bestowed silver, or nothing—and who, when his family took the scarlet-fever, sent all their infected clothing to the county infirmary for the benefit of the sick poor.

There was the hunting man, who was not out with the hounds that day, though it was the last of a splendid season, because he would not, for the finest run in the world, miss such a treat as Mrs. Tenterden Jones's party, but who in reality was only present because he funk'd the country which he knew by the hunting fixtures they were to draw, and because he had got a purler on his last day out, which had left every bone in his body in a state of ache. There was the wide-awake mamma, who turned her back on the doorway, because she knew that her

daughter and an "eligible" were spooning on the other side of it; and the stupid mamma, who crushed her own fat person in between beau and belle, and asked the gentleman if he would kindly move and leave her a little space. There was the talkative lady, who jabbered away like a piping canary all through the most touching songs; and the silent one, who, when requested by an artless and unsuspecting young man to have some more tea, produced an ear-trumpet three yards long, and grimly asked him to repeat what he had said. There was the gaudy lady, who stood resolutely in the centre of the room to show off her dress; and the faded one, who retired into a corner and stayed there, because she knew that her "back-lacing" had come undone. There was the young maid, who brought her sweetheart and a roll of songs, and stowed both away in a quiet corner until they should be wanted; and the *old* maid, who brought her cat in her reticule, to the manifest delight of the poodle, who spied it at once, and licked his chops, and fairly slobbered with joy at the ecstatic prospect of gobbling it up by-and-by.

The music was indeed a treat. The eldest Miss Sourberry opened the programme with "My mother bids me bind my hair," which, as she had none and wore a front, was particularly appropriate. She was likewise in a state of delicious uncertainty as to whether the possessive pronoun should be pronounced "me," or "my," and as the short-sighted curate stood beside her while she sang, and turned the leaves of the music with an entire disregard to the requirements of the vocalist (who was consequently distracted, and had to compose an entire page in place of one which fell under the piano) the effect was novel and interesting to a degree. The fierce man followed with "I'd wish to be a daisy," which the curate volunteered to play, and did so with such imperfectness that the afflicted singer jerked his elbow, and pommelled his back, and uttered a torrent of adjectives during the symphony, which accorded ill with the mild words of the touching melody he had undertaken to sing. Then the young maid fetched her roll and her lover from the corner, and opened out the one, while she shut up the other with a look, lest he should begin to speak, and reveal the ignoble fact that he stammered. Finally, the old maid minced to the piano, and began to bleat "I'm saddest when I sing;" and while the company groaned, "So are we! so are we!" the poodle found out that she had left her reticule on the sofa, and contrived to damage the contents of it a good deal before an extensive show

of flying fur and a variety of demoniac screeches attracted the attention of the host, who, by choking the poodle and sneezing on the cat, managed to restore order without disturbing the song.

Some sweet things in duets and trios succeeded; and then the mild man sang, to his own accompaniment, Handel's "Honour and Arms." His voice was a feeble tenor—his tone deprecatory and weak—and whenever he repeated the passage, "Though I could slay thee at a blow," he tried to adopt a fierce expression of countenance by rolling his eyes and wrinkling up his nose, which so diverted the three young olive-branches of the family that they proceeded to imitate him, with extraordinary success. This distortion of his features was attended with yet another unpleasant result, for his eyeglass, finding itself disturbed, tumbled out of the eye in which it was stuck, and kept the mild man practising gymnastics in order to preserve it from damage and return it to its place, until at length, just as he was violently declaring the scorn in which he held his foe, down it went full tilt upon the ivories, and, being broken to pieces, left him to grope his way helplessly about for the remainder of the afternoon—trampling on the dog, sitting on the cat, shaking hands with all the wrong people when going away, and finally departing with the brevet-major's hat on his head instead of his own, and the curate's presentation umbrella tucked confidently under his arm.

The advent of the great Howlerini made a profound sensation. He came late, and condescended—after much coaxing and pawing, and several "Ah, do's!" from Mrs. Tenterden Jones—to favour the company with a plaintive Italian ditty, blossoming out into a brilliant, not to say stunning bravura movement at the end.

The signor was pallid and stout, with a face like cold dumping, and a mane of greasy hair hanging æsthetically down his fat back. His coat collar had a peculiar glaze, and he wore a soiled shirt and a great many rings. Altogether he was a tremendous acquisition; and when he rolled up his goggle eyes, and stretched his mouth, until to see both ends of it you should go to the back of his head, the three Miss Sourberrys drew out their three pocket-handkerchiefs and wiped their eyes, sniffing all the while, as though deeply affected by the pathos of the music, as no doubt they were. The professor accompanied himself, too, with touching grace, and as he had a way of ele-

vating and depressing his shoulders, and outstretching and withdrawing his neck, like a sick poll-parrot, it was no wonder that the philanthropist looked about for brandy-and-water, and that Dr. Tenterden Jones stole quietly away to his surgery to prepare a remedy in case of any sudden emergency.

The greater portion of the company had gone, and the rest were loitering and talking about departing, when a clatter of hoofs without, and a sounding knock at the street door, heralded the entry of a gentleman in hunting costume, whose coat and breeches were muddy, and who carried a crumpled hat and a short crop in his hand, as though he gloried in the appearance of being fresh from deeds of "derring do."

"Why, dear me! it's Mr. Jessel," exclaimed the hostess, in a flutter of delight, "come to tell us all about the hunt. Well, this *is* kind."

The doctor also, who had come upstairs again, hurried forward to say something nice to the new guest, but a sneeze stopped him, and if he uttered anything at all his pocket-handkerchief swallowed it up. Mr. Jessel, who was a sporting attorney and a land-agent as well, took all these civilities in excellent part, and then sat down to refresh himself. He was a man of more than average height, with peculiar dark eyes, and a handsome Napoleonic face. His figure was good, too, and his well-cut hunting-coat set it off to advantage.

"Well, what news?" he asked, as he sipped a glass which the page had brought quietly to his elbow. "I have lost a treat, I suppose?"

"Oh, *such* a treat!" exclaimed the second Miss Sourberry, with a roll of her limpid eyes. "Signor Howlerini sang a perfectly divine thing, with two snakes and a high note at the end. I'm sure *I* couldn't help crying! he looked so beautiful, too."

"Humph! I can't say I'm sorry to have missed *that* performance," said Jessel, glancing over his shoulder to make sure that the signor had departed. "Well, who else had you? Was little Sweetapple here?"

"Yes; and she looked so bilious," returned the amiable spinster, curling up her nose until a hat could have hung upon it. "I can't see anything to admire in that young woman."

"Never mind. Let's hear something about the hunt," exclaimed the little doctor, who prided himself on his taste for sport and manly pastimes. "Had you a good day, Jessel?"

"First rate. A splendid wind-up. As warm as May, and a burning scent lying. Had a clipping run—some capital fencing—and a kill in the open, with most of the field well up. What more could any man want?"

The doctor rubbed his hands ecstatically.

"What, indeed, my dear sir?" he chuckled with delight; "they positively had nothing left to wish for. Did you wait to see the end?"

"No, they were going on to Glanston—some who had fresh horses out, or who didn't mind riding beaten ones. My nag had had enough, and so had L. I never ride for a fall, though I often get one, so I turned for home."

"How *very* sweet it must be to hunt!" exclaimed the admiring Miss Sourberry, who, although the very thought of the perilous pastime sent cold water down her back, nevertheless thought it good policy to appear interested in the conversation. "How nice the dress is, too! quite like uniform. Is the fox *always* killed, Mr. Jessel?"

"Oh dear, no; more's the pity. He saves his brush, the villain, whenever he can find an unstopped earth."

This was Greek to the lady, but she sagely pretended wisdom, and shut her mouth, which, under the circumstances, was the very best thing she could have done—if her sex will only believe it.

"Many out?" inquired the doctor, after a brief pause for refreshment.

"Yes, a fairish lot. The last day, you know, generally brings a good attendance."

"Ay, just so. Any new faces?"

"No, I think not. You know them all—or most of them. There was a man hurt, I'm told, within a mile of you here; but I don't know if it's true."

"A man hurt!" repeated the little practitioner, growing suddenly excited, and beginning to rub his hands in anticipation of a job. "Dear me! fancy that. Badly hurt, did you say?"

"No, I said nothing about bad or good," responded the attorney dryly; "I didn't see the thing happen, if it happened at all; but there was a lot of grief to-day, the fences are all so blind, and the lands holding, after the rain. I must be off," he added, finishing his glass, and jumping up. "It will be seven o'clock by the time I'm at home."

"Not a foot you'll stir out of this," exclaimed the hospitable little doctor, thrusting him down upon his chair again. "I've had your horse brought round to the stable and fed, and you're going to put on one of my old coats and stop here for your dinner; so not a word out o' your head."

What the favoured guest would have said in reply to this invitation will never be known, for at that precise moment a noise of wheels dashing up to the door, and a general confusion outside, caused all the females among the company to rush promiscuously to the front window, and to burst into a vociferous clamour of surprise.

"A carriage!" "More visitors!" "A lot of hunting men, I declare!" "No." "Yes, I can see the red coats." "Stay! it's a sick person. They are lifting him out. He must be very bad; he seems unable to move."

"How pale he is—positively white! My God! he is dead."

"No, not at all—only in a faint."

These and similar expressions were poured rapidly forth, while the business-loving doctor—with an eye to the main chance, and a nose which smelled guineas in the wind—scuttled off downstairs as fast as his legs could carry him, and his sporting friend followed at a soberer pace, to be in readiness in case help should be required.

"Dear, dear!" and "Only think!" and "Just fancy!" exclaimed half a dozen of the ladies, all excessively red with curiosity and adventure.

"What a strange thing! It must be the man Mr. Jessel heard was hurt. I wonder who he is?"

"I know," said Mrs. Tenterden Jones, with a sagaciously mysterious air. "At least, I am almost sure I do."

"Who is he? who is he?" panted the excited chorus.

"I think," said the hostess, slowly—"mind, only *think*—but I *do* think that the hurt man is Mr. Bright, of Nutley."

"Phew!" whistled the chorus, "you don't say so? I hope he is not *badly* hurt."

Mrs. Tenterden Jones's head went up with a toss.

"Well, I'm sure I don't wish ill to anybody, but, if he is, it's the first of his money Dr. Tenterden Jones will ever have seen. No messenger from Nutley ever yet knocked at our door. A doctor from Dublin, always, if you please! Nobody else good enough. And as for that girl—his niece, or whatever she is—a more upsetting young monkey was never in the

country. What was she but a child a year or two ago? And yet, when I sent her an invitation for a dance, she refused to come, sent an apology, and never even called after."

"How AWFUL!" exclaimed the sympathizing chorus, throwing up their hands and eyes together.

"She's a conceited minx!" cried Mrs. Tenterden Jones, irritated by the recollection of her wrongs; "and will be doubly unbearable now if anything happens to *him*—for, of course, she'll come in for Nutley and a lot more. He's awful rich, they say."

"Bless me! What a run there will be on her if that's the case," exclaimed the jealous chorus.

Mrs. Tenterden Jones shrugged her shoulders, and beat the carpet with her foot, which, being a heavy one, made a noise, and set the poodle barking.

"The run won't last long," she said; "her choice is made—at least so I'm told."

"*Really!* Who on earth can it be?" clamoured the chorus, gaping all around the oracle, and hungering for news. "Have you heard?"

"Not the name exactly. Some fellow she met in Dublin in the winter, when she was up there with her grand friends."

"Nonsense! Tell us all about it!" cried the satellites, gathering like bees about a hive.

And, the depressed servant being called to make a fresh pot of tea, they all sat down to enjoy it, with the delightful addition of a dish of scandal to flavour the bohea.

Meanwhile, a very different scene was in course of enactment below. In the surgery—where all was very quiet and dim—a figure lay on a couch; that of a man in the prime of life—handsome and brown-haired—pale, and terribly still. His head hung upon his shoulder—his right arm fell by his side, the hand trailing motionless upon the floor. The ghostly light of the waning April day stole faintly into the room, as six or seven silent men stood grouped about the body—for such in reality was all that it was. The little doctor waved them back.

"It is death," he said. "His neck is broken. He must have fallen upon his head."

"That's just how he *did* fall," said one of the men, a country yokel, who had helped to carry him in. "I seen it happen. He came along fast at the place; there was a big drop; he couldn't see it till he was over the fence. The beast pecked, and threw

him right out, over her head. It was soft plough, and I didn't think he was hurt; but he never offered to get up, and when me and another turned him over we seen how it was."

"What is to be done? has any one gone to tell Miss Bright?" inquired a gentleman present.

Yes; Mr. Jessel had kindly volunteered to go—had started at once, in fact, and had taken the carriage in which the dead man had been conveyed from the field.

"Is it far to Nutley?" somebody asked.

No; only about two miles, or at most three, and the horses were fresh.

They sat down and waited, or loitered to the door, and gazed down the usually quiet street—now all astir with news of the accident—while scared faces looked from almost every window. Then they went back to the surgery, and talked in low tones about what a dreadful thing it was—and how awfully sudden—and believed that he was wealthy, but had heard something about a mortgage—though it might not be true. Ah, ever so! When a man dies, his survivors ask what property he has left behind. The Angel who bends above him asks what good deeds he has sent before.

Time waned, and the old *edax rerum* had bitten another hour out of the brief twenty-four, when the watched-for vehicle came dashing along the street. The kindly doctor had sent for his spouse to be in readiness to receive the afflicted lady, whose coming all awaited; and the satellites had taken the hint, and had departed, unwillingly enough, and were then hanging about to gather up the news. Mrs. Tenterden Jones had exchanged her satin gown for a less gorgeous costume, had smoothed her frizzled hair, and was descending the staircase, very stiff and important, when the carriage stopped at the door. She had the recollection of the rejected invitation still rankling within her breast, and mingled with her sympathy for the bereaved girl was something of a feeling of triumph that the proud spirit was humbled, and that she, the offended hostess, was called upon to show kindness to the offender. She expected tears and tantrums, she afterwards said; but she saw nothing of the kind. Mr. Jessel got out, and offered his hand to a tall, slight, darkly veiled figure, who had journeyed with him in the carriage. The lady did not accept or touch it, but sprang out unassisted, and entered the dimly lighted hall. Mrs. Tenterden Jones, who was midway on the last flight of stairs, could see pretty distinctly all

that passed, although she herself was shrouded by the semi-darkness ; and this is what she saw—The girl hurried in, the man followed her, and strove to take her hand.

“ You will forgive me,” she heard him whisper ; “ you *know* I love you, and there is now no——”

“ Forgive you? *Never!*” was the girl’s answer uttered ere he had completed the sentence upon his lips. “ If you loved me, you would protect me from affront. Oh, is there no *woman* here—no friend—who will lead me to my darling, and save me from this man ? ”

Deeply rooted as was Mrs. Jones’s grievance, and equally deep her longing to hear more—that piteous appeal, those earnest tones were not to be resisted. She coughed to show that she was there, and came down with slow and stately steps.

“ The devil ! ” muttered the escort, falling back in perplexed amazement. But the next instant he recovered himself, brushed past the veiled figure with a murmured, “ I am sorry !—pray forgive ! ”—said aloud that the young lady was labouring under a natural excitement, not quite conscious of what she was saying, in fact—and, having told this pardonable untruth, shook hands hurriedly with the hostess, and hastened round to the stable to fetch out his tired horse. Perhaps he dreaded to remain—feared to see the confrontal of the living with the dead. He need not have done so, for those who witnessed it saw no demonstration of grief, no tears, nor heard one sob or murmur from the young lips that just kissed the face of the dead man—in pallor like to his own—and then asked that they two might be taken home together.

“ What shall I do with it ? ” asked Dr. Tenterden Jones of himself, as he held a morsel of paper before the candle in his dressing-room that same night, and read it for the twentieth time, with spectacles astride his nose, and his tasselled night-cap nodding sagely above it. “ What *on earth* shall I do with it ? ”

And, although he put it away quite safely at the bottom of an old desk, he got out of bed three times before morning—ill though he felt, and heavy with threatened sickness—to make sure that it was in its hiding-place.

CHAPTER II.

"I BELIEVE you were born without a heart, or, if you have one, I have no share in it."

And the handsome fair boy, who was an ensign, twenty-two years of age, with a very hot head, a very susceptible nature, and a good property in prospective, actually had tears in his great soft blue eyes, as he turned them away from the woman who was fooling him.

She was seated in a little low wicker chair, with her small feet propped up on the fender, and a big screen in her diminutive hand; and stretched close to her was an obese pug, very cross and snappish, and on a table by her side was a dainty little tray, on which lay an empty tea-cup and a full one, and on which also rested a case containing an opal ring.

The scene was the drawing-room of a cosy little villa near Hampstead. It was not handsomely furnished by any means, but such articles as were in it were tastefully arranged, and there were heaps of pretty little nicknacks which looked like Indian things, scattered about. Soft lace curtains shrouded the bay window in enticingly fleecy folds—and a birdcage was suspended among them, while an airy little fern-stand was enclosed within. On the cottage piano was a pathetic-looking song, and in the grate was a brightly burning fire; for, although it was then May, the weather was chilly, and on that particular afternoon the rain was coming down fast.

There was a neat little writing-table in a secluded corner, on which lay numerous open notes and telegrams; and there were a good many framed photographs, chiefly military, on tables, cabinets, mantelpieces, and walls. A Japanese folding-screen shaded off the entrance to the room, and a thick curtain of crimson cloth hung down where folding doors would otherwise have been.

The figure in the chair was Lady Kissie, who enjoyed the soubriquet of "The Beauty." Her Christian name was Vine.

Why she had been so baptized nobody knew ; some whim of a dead parent's perhaps—or she might have assumed the name, thinking it a pretty one and uncommon, which it certainly was. Anyhow, Vine she was called, in singularly inappropriate fashion, for she had certainly not been a fruitful one upon the walls of her husband's house, nor had she cast her tendrils about him or clung to him for succour, except for the very commonplace and unromantic support which L. S. D. went to signify ; but it must be confessed that, for this particular description of “ propping up,” she had hung to him with a tenacity quite wonderful to think of, and which would not be shaken off. She was not an aristocrat by any means, this well-got-up little woman ; quite a Bohemian, rather, and gloried in being thought one.

Her husband, an elderly and rather impecunious baronet, had been raised to the peerage in recognition of some services connected with drainage and mining works, at which he had spent his life and the greater portion of his fortune, and finding himself “ my lord ” with very little money and very much debt, bad health, a bad liver, and a wife who would spend Golconda on her person, had quietly ended all difficulties by putting a pistol to his mouth one fine morning, in lieu of breakfast, and blowing out whatever brains Nature had originally given him.

How Lady Kissie had contrived to live afterwards was a mystery to her female acquaintance. Not that there had been at any time the remotest probability of her being weighed down beneath the shock of unexpected calamity—none whatever ; her mind was strong, and her powers of endurance marvellous ; but her means were so small and her tastes so extravagant that it was a wonder to everybody how she pulled along at all. Yet she did. She had a charming little house, with a garden and small tennis-ground attached, and a picturesque little greenhouse, with a morsel of a vine, which was quite as unprofitable as its namesake, trailing all about it, both inside and out ; and there was a little vegetable patch which grew seakale and asparagus enough for a bird, and one particular rose-bush, fat and flourishing, which was carefully watched and tended, and despoiled of its glowing treasures—sometimes sparingly, sometimes wholesale—when it yielded them, for presentation to favoured swains. There was a little summer-house, too, a very small one, with a trellis-work of wood and creepers about it, where Lady Kissie adjourned when the weather was favourable, and posed in a wadded tea-gown, with a shawl spread under her, because the seat was damp, and a footstool, lest the ground should be like-

wise so, and a tiny silver tea-service before her, and a copy of Swinburne in her lap. There she sat, in extreme discomfort, flippin' away a spider, and giving an occasional little scream at an earwig or worm, and frightening off a persevering daddy-longlegs with her scented pocket-handkerchief, just in time to prevent his leaving a consignment of three or four superfluous legs on the top slice of her buttered toast.

Great torture all this was to the desolate and lonely Vine, but it looked picturesque to be sitting out of doors when gentlemen called—taking her solitary tea, too. It had a kind of unprotected appearance which was especially touching, and was largely calculated to suggest civilities, and floral offerings, and tempting invitations, if not the more decided and substantial pleasures of matrimonial offers from eligible and carefully spotted *partis*.

Not quite so edifying, however, was it to behold her ladyship, under the adverse circumstances consequent upon a sudden shower of rain—a “horrid thing,” she called it—spoiling the tea equipage, deluging Swinburne, cutting off the likelihood of visitors, and sending the little speculator herself, covered with wrath and insects, scudding across the gravelled pathway into the house, with the padded tea-gown tucked up excessively high, and a pair of silk-clad shanks making wonderfully rapid tracks for a place of shelter. And then to see her face for the next hour or so—to say nothing of the sneezings, and wheezings, and the nose-blowing, and eye-wiping, and calling for mustard and camphor, drachms and potions, until the page-boy nearly burst himself out of his jacket with hurry and precipitation, and the neglected pug set up a dismal howling on his own account and got bowled over for his pains.

In addition to the house, garden, rose-bush, &c., and the summer-house just described, Lady Kissie kept four servants—nobody knew how—and a neat victoria with a pair of spanking greys. She gave delightful little dinners of two or four at a time—never uneven numbers on principle—belonged to half a dozen clubs, occasionally rented a Thames villa, frequently put her name down for charitable objects, had a good box at Covent Garden through the opera season, and dressed better than half the women in her set. Not one, even the most knowing, could conceive how it was done, for undoubtedly the beauty was not rich.

Where did the money come from? her friends and enemies hopelessly inquired. She never seemed to want for anything,

nor was she in debt, save a few hundreds to her milliner, and an odd trifle here and there to florists and indispensable decorators of various kinds and callings.

In appearance she was small, and very slight. Her waist was barely twenty inches. Perhaps I should say *scarcely*, not barely, for when in the latter condition it was considerably more—Lady Kissie having a peculiar faculty for expanding, when not compressed, like an india-rubber ball. Her feet and hands were extremely diminutive, and were artfully made to appear even more so than they really were, by the most fashionable and becoming gear. Her age was a trifle over thirty, but she passed for four years less. She was not at all remarkably pretty, except at night, when—as men were wont to say—“she lighted up well;” and she had a way of posing, and of gathering laces and flowers and draperies and all sorts of pretty things about her, which helped to deceive the uninitiated, and had a marvelously good effect. Her nose, unfortunately, was inclined to be slightly red, except when well powdered, but she kept its complexion judiciously in check while she heightened her own, and she had an abundance of bright hair, and a pair of perfectly wonderful brown eyes, which had done more damage, and were daily doing it, than all the artillery and ammunition ever yet gathered before a seat of war. Game was Lady Kissie’s ambition—her one great aim in life—and her eyes were the fowling-pieces with which she brought it down. She never slew it at once; oh, no! that would have been too humane and offhand. She just wounded it and brought it to earth, and played with it or tortured it as the fancy took her, and then, when further prey appeared in the distance, left it to die, or recover itself and fly away—which latter, happily for itself, it generally contrived to do.

The young fledgling from whom the opal ring was an offering, had been aimed at and brought to earth three months previously; the plucking of the feathers had amused her vastly for awhile, but already there was other game in sight, and so the torturing process was now in full swing.

“Don’t be a fool, dear boy,” she said laughing, and extending a little hand, with a quantity of lace ruffles at the wrist, and a whole heap of bangles surmounting it, every one of which the youth frantically kissed. “Pray don’t be an idiot. How on earth can I take your ring? Opals are dreadfully unlucky!”

But she drew it nearer to her all the while, for it was too costly to be lightly relinquished.

“Oh, are they really?” said the boy, in dismal accents. “I

did not know; but I am sure you don't believe in senseless superstitions. Do, pray, wear it once—even once—for my sake!" and Charley Crawshay—handsome Charley—very red and terribly in earnest, went down upon his knees before his idol, and looked supremely ridiculous.

"Oh, get up, for goodness' sake!" said Lady Kissie, laughing heartily, and displaying a set of little sharp white teeth which looked as though they could bite. "What an absurd boy you are! and how *dreadful* if any one should come in! There, don't be offended," as the youth, crimson and abashed, rose to his feet; "of course I shall wear the ring—for a day, at any rate—and I really think it very pretty. Now, that is enough. You know I hate thanks, and everything that makes a fuss. I must positively dismiss you, dear," jumping up, "for I have to go out."

"And may I not go with you?" he inquired; "part of the way at least. I don't want a bit to know where you are going. You can dismiss me whenever you please."

"No," said Lady Kissie, decisively, "you cannot come, and what I say I mean. But," going to the window, "I can have your hansom—bless me, how it rains!—and you can walk until you pick up another for yourself; and, stay, I believe I am not engaged for this evening. Let me see," and she walked to her writing-table. "No, a previous engagement has fallen through, so you may call for me if you like—now, no raptures—at 7.30, and take me to dine at the Continental. Now go."

But he lingered, and looked down.

"I wish I might come with you," he said, pleadingly. "It will seem so long till 7.30."

"No, you must go at once," she answered, bustling round, "I never change my mind, or give an order twice; but, if you are a very good boy, I shall perhaps take you after dinner to see some charming people, who will, I am sure, be pleased to welcome you as a friend of mine."

And, with a stately little sweep, miladi drew aside the red curtains and vanished into space, throwing him a final shot from the fowling-pieces by way of a *coup de grace*; and the helpless game, wounded and sore, half-plucked, and worried well-nigh to death, went down the little soft-carpeted staircase, gave the cabman a sovereign, with directions to drive the lady whither she might wish, and with one last wistful glance at the windows—behind one of which she was hiding her laughing face—walked away, umbrellaless, through the soaking rain.

CHAPTER III.

AND the woman he left behind him, what did she ? Well, when she had peeped at her drenched admirer until he was out of sight, and had gone into inward convulsions over his discomfiture, and tapped herself on the back, and fanned, and drunk a glass of fine old claret, and frightened the canary out of its wits with a hideous Japanese idol to make it cease singing, and smacked the pug for squealing when she trod upon it—she called up the page, and spent ten minutes in giving him voluminous directions concerning the messages to be delivered to various persons who might chance to call. To some of these, notes were to be given ; others were simply to be told that she was out, and to receive no further information ; others were to be informed that she had left town for a fortnight, or had gone to a concert, or a bazaar, or a flower mission, or to visit the patients at the Cancer Hospital, or to read and pray with the inmates of the adjacent hospice for the dying. That the boy was expected to remember all she told him—not to tell Father Friarly that she had gone to the concert, or General Gendarme that she was ministering at the hospice—in fact, not to involve her veracity or his own in a fatal jumble—was a trifling example of the utter unreasonableness of Lady Kissie's requirements ; but, to say the truth and do her justice, she endeavoured to assist the youth's memory with a variety of highly sagacious instructions and injunctions, which in a measure served to keep his senses collected, and to preserve him from lunacy.

Having arranged this little business—an every-day one—to her satisfaction, she hastened to her chamber, exchanged her tea-gown for an outdoor costume, choked the pug with a piece of unwholesome cake to quiet him during her absence, skipped into the cab which was in waiting for her, and was whirled rapidly away to her station.

Half an hour later she was knocking at the door of a house in Grosvenor Place.

A brougham was standing at it, and as she waited to be answered, a lady came out—old, sharp-visaged, and wan—who wore a quantity of jewelry, and had a shrewish look, as though she were continually on the scold.

Lady Kissie's face darkened when she beheld her, but it was too late to draw back, so she put on a delighted smile, and came up with extended hand.

"My *dear* Mrs. Crosse! So *glad* to see you, I am sure. Quite a coincidence, is it not? Anybody at home here?"

"Bet," responded the other, who had not smiled at all.

"Oh, dear!" ejaculated her ladyship, disappointedly, "is nobody else in? Where is Mrs. Blount?"

"Not downstairs," answered the grum woman, whose stern eyes were taking in every detail of Lady Kissie's piquante toilette. "Perhaps she will see *you*. I had not time to wait. A word with you," she went on, as the lively beauty was frisking past, "I shall soon have to call upon you for that little matter I won here last Sunday evening."

"Of course, by all means," responded miladi, with a gleaming smile. "I could have settled with you this moment, but I have just come from the Consumptive Bazaar, and you know how money goes at these places. They have positively cleared me out—not a penny left."

"Yes, I know," responded the grum woman, with ill-concealed sarcasm in her tones; "you're awfully charitable, but 'justice before generosity' is my motto, so I shall call upon you next Thursday."

And she went down the steps and got into her brougham, while Lady Kissie muttered "Old pig!" between her pearly little teeth, and followed the butler to the drawing-room.

It was a very gorgeous apartment, containing everything that wealth could purchase or taste dictate. Carpets of softest velvet, costly Persian rugs, mirrors from floor to ceiling, furniture quaint and satin-covered, pictures of rarest worth, china and *bric-à-brac* which only a millionaire could purchase, and hot-house flowers blooming in every vase.

The folding-doors were slightly ajar, showing that the inner room was fitted up in a plainer although scarcely less expensive style, and that four or five small square tables—each covered with a neat crimson cloth—occupied the centre of the floor.

Forth from this room came the sound of a most unmusical voice, humming an opera air all out of tune; and as Lady Kissie

did not care in the least for music, even when it was good—although she said she did, for fashion's sake—she rustled her skirts very audibly, coughed still more so, and finally kicked over a footstool with a noise which brought out the singer—a girl, who wore a black gingham dress and a holland apron, and carried a duster in her hand.

“Good evening, Miss Blount,” said her ladyship, holding out a little lace-gloved paw, with a smile through which a frown visibly struggled.

“Oh, good evening, Lady Kissie,” answered the girl, who had red hair, green eyes, an up-turned nose, and freckles, and whose wide ruddy mouth was garnished at the corners with a little moustache. She would, in fact, have been a terribly ugly girl, had it not been for her “parlous” white skin, the intelligent shrewdness of her face, and the beauty of her shining teeth. “I never saw you, or heard you come in. It's so awfully wet, I thought no visitors would come, and so I was dusting pa's pet pipe-rack.”

“Don't let me disturb you, pray,” said Lady Kissie, eyeing the speaker somewhat coldly. “Is your mother at home?”

“Stepmother is,” replied the girl, tucking the duster into a big pocket in front of her apron. “Mother ain't alive.”

“I am aware of that,” said the visitor, shortly. “I meant your stepmother, of course.”

“Well, you didn't say so,” answered the girl, who had been christened “Bet,” and was so called, although her name was not Elizabeth, and the cognomen bore reference to a gambling transaction connected with her birth.

“Can I see Mrs. Blount?” inquired Lady Kissie, whose colour was rapidly rising, and her temper also. “It's very late, and I have to go back to the bazaar at Soho, from which I have just come.”

“Have you, though?” exclaimed Bet, staring hard at her with pursed mouth. “Dear! I shouldn't have thought it.”

“Should not have thought it?” repeated her ladyship, curtly. “May I inquire why?”

“Oh, it don't matter,” responded Bet, with a sort of little inward giggle, which seemed to be less heard than seen. “I know you are awfully good and charitable, and all that, but somehow I thought you were some other where—not at a bazaar.”

“You are rather enigmatical,” said the provoked beauty, flash-

ing sparks of fire from the fowling-pieces, and looking terribly vexed. "I think you are fond of speaking in riddles—an Irish peculiarity, perhaps. Now, will you oblige me by saying where your fertile imagination induced you to believe I had spent my day?"

"Oh, about your *day*, I don't know," replied the girl, assuming an air of comic gravity, and sitting down on the edge of a lilac-embroidered chair. "Most fashionable ladies hold postal appointments, and have a lot to do looking after the mails; but I thought *you* had been last engaged in investigating the interior of a bakery, or smelling a batch of new bread, because your nose is all over flour."

"Is it indeed?" said Lady Kissie, in terribly sharp tones, and flushing quite red with anger. "May I ask if you are often taken like this, or is your present amiability an exceptional coincidence?"

"Oh, I'm sometimes more amiable than at others," answered Bet, shaking her head sagaciously. "Moods vary, you know. It depends on the liver, I think."

"I thought nobody had one except your father," exclaimed Lady Kissie, with sneering sarcasm.

"Oh, haven't they, though!" said Bet, blowing her nose with a noise like a trumpet; "mine's a caution. All Indian livers are. If you want to see 'the Step,' she's above in her room, trying on dresses, or resting after the operation. Go up; she'll be charmed to see you. You can tell her how to twirl her tail, and fix her fichu to her fancy. I'm no good at it, but you're splendid. Go along! front room, overhead."

"I wish you would learn to be a little more polite," said Lady Kissie, as she fluttered to the door. "It is not nice to tell visitors to 'go along.'"

"Oh dear! what matter?" said Bet, with a yawn. "It's expressive, at all events."

And rising lazily, she whistled a stave or two as the irate beauty rustled from the room, and, following her to the door, shut it after her, without a word of apology.

CHAPTER IV

THE apartment to which Lady Kissie was admitted by the sound of a languid "Come in," was a large, luxuriously-furnished bedroom, with a wide grate, wherein a glowing fire was burning; and, before it, lounging in a wide armchair, with a cushion at her back, and another under her feet, and another supporting her head, was a lady, somewhat past the prime of life, handsome still, despite undue portliness and too lavish a use of paint, powder, false hair, and all the various adjuncts with which worldly women strive to hide the footprints of Time, but which, in reality, make them stand out with such terribly vivid distinctness. Middle-age is the one great test of character in men, and immeasurably more so in women. With them it is the five-barred gate which rises suddenly before them, as, forgetful of the flight of time, they canter along with the rest of the flying field. Some—a very few—walk calmly up to it, open the lock, and pass through with equanimity undisturbed; others, reckless and impatient, spring over it, and gallop forward upon the other side, as though eager to get clean away from the warning obstacle; while a remnant—a very large one—looks on either hand for some gap in the skirting fence, and goes creeping through it, in a secret, cowardly sort of way; not bold enough to jump, and yet with a goading, miserable consciousness that there is no turning back, no standing still and waiting, nothing for it but to *go forward*, with a good grace or a bad, as principle or temperament may suggest and guide.

Of these latter was the lady in the chair. She had crept through the gap, and was stealing away upon the offside, as though hoping that her arrival at the obstacle had not been observed. Very fair in face she was, and all her surroundings were luxurious; but youth was past, and on her brow there was a line of mourning for it, which time and futurity never could efface.

"My dear," she said, holding out a plump white hand, re-

splendent with costly rings; "it is positively refreshing to see you. Here have I been all day, worried with dressmakers, and not a soul to speak to, or ask advice of, except Bet, who has not two ideas. So tired as I am, too, crossing that vile Channel last night, with every soul on board so disgustingly sick, and the stewardess flying about like a bee in an oven. It makes me ill to think of it."

"Poor dear! How horrid! And so you really only arrived this morning?" said Lady Kissie, staring very hard at the pink cheeks and the alabaster forehead, and the fringe of beautiful jetty hair which just showed beneath the lace of the becoming little cap.

"Yes, only this morning. You are better than an angel to come and look me up so soon. I should have been home three days ago, but for those awful storms. That place would have killed me in another week."

"And the Major? has he returned with you?" inquired Lady Kissie, thirsting for news.

"He? Oh, no! There was a lot to do and arrange, so he stopped behind to do it. Besides, *she* was not ready to come."

"To come!" echoed her ladyship in a high key; "you don't mean to say he is bringing her here?"

"Oh, yes! I do," was the rejoinder. "We can't exactly leave her to starve, can we? Of course, everything is ours now, and we need not trouble about her if we do not choose; but you know the way the world talks, and the sort of man Blount is. He *will* have her here; it is our duty, he says, to offer her a home, and I suppose, under the circumstances, there is scarcely any help for it. But it's an awful nuisance all the same." And the languid fashionist sighed, and clasped her hands, and closed her blue eyes with the air of a suffering martyr.

"Well, you know best; but I confess I don't quite understand the circumstances," said Lady Kissie, who was bubbling over with curiosity—"I never knew that the Major (or the Colonel, perhaps I ought to call him) had a cousin of any importance, until you sent to tell me that he was dead, and that you had to hurry over to Ireland to see after his affairs; nor could I possibly glean much from the one little scrap of a letter you sent me during your absence. I believe you would not have written to me at all," added her ladyship, pouting, "only you wanted somebody to complain to about *her*. Tell me the whole thing, will you, for goodness' sake. I am dying to know all about it." And

Lady Kissie unloosed her wrappings, and drew up her chair to the fire, as though she meant to make a lengthened stay.

"Well, it's just about the very best stroke of good luck that ever fell out for us," confessed the occupant of the *fauteuil*, arranging her cushions, and smiling a little satisfied smile. "Of course, I don't mind telling *you*; we are pretty intimately acquainted with one another's affairs. The truth is, matters were getting rather desperate—nothing new worth naming was turning up, and a lot of old chances, or old certainties rather, were dropping off: you understand—getting married, or frightened, or religious, or pumped out, or something or another equally odious, and, in fact, we saw nothing for it but to give up this house, and go for a season to Monte Carlo, when, in the most fortunate manner possible, this man, whom none of us knew or cared about, broke his neck, and left us a clear coast, for he died without a will. I suppose if he had had time to make one we should never have had a penny, for he turned up his nose at Blount after that affair at Asseergham, and Delhi finished the business. Men are so abominably jealous, you know, my dear—positively worse than women; they are, indeed. Not one farthing should we have had of his, but that luck so chanced it. *She* would have had all."

"And who *is* she?" inquired Lady Kissie, spreading her hands to the blaze, and looking delighted with the gossip. "How did he pick her up?"

A shrug of the shoulders, an elevation of the pencilled eyebrows, and then the answer came.

"My dear, nobody knows. She has always been with him. Some relative's child that he adopted, he used to say; but"—with another shrug—" 'tis impossible to tell. People talked, you know, as they always do and always will. Some said she was a foundling, whom he was too good-hearted to desert; others—but no matter; I daresay you can guess."

"Well, I don't envy you, being saddled with her," said Lady Kissie, after a short, meditative pause; "but the rest of the bargain is well enough, is it not?"

"Yes, excellent; though there are drawbacks, as in everything else. That Irish property, for instance: we shall have no end of worry and loss over it, I expect; and goodness only knows in what mess he may have left his affairs in Leicestershire; turned the house into a dog-kennel, most likely, and grown oats in the lawn for his horses. When a man is animal mad, you never know

a bit what he will do. I quite expect to find that this departed Nimrod has been training his polo ponies over the flower-beds, and teaching his hunters to jump the garden walls. Just as likely as not. We shall have a lively time of it when things come to be settled down there. And then, this girl—the hardest pill of all to swallow! I often wish”—with a short, uneasy laugh—“that she had occupied a pillion on the obliging animal which got her caretaker so neatly out of the way. We should then have had a clear coast.”

“Ah, true; but, unluckily, things never fall out exactly as we want them,” murmured the beauty, reflectively. “And what is she like, my dear? An awful gaby, I suppose?”

“No, that is just the worst of it; and yet, perhaps, the best too. I shall have the less trouble. Her figure is good, and she is not bad-looking, but quite too pale. However, when I come to manage her, we can rectify that.”

“Be sure you give her the best sort of rouge: namely, plenty of wholesome food, and fresh air, and early hours, and kind treatment,” said a quiet voice from the window,—and both, turning suddenly round, beheld Bet, seated tailor-wise upon the carpet, knitting a grey stocking with a very big foot to it. “Country girls,” she went on, “can’t do with kickshaws, and nailed-up windows, and getting up one day, and going to bed in the next. If you keep her nodding over a card-table all night and deprive her of her beauty sleep, she’ll cost you a fortune in cosmetics, and you’ll have to supply her with a puff and flour for her nose.”

“Good gracious! however did *you* come there!” exclaimed Lady Kissie, in displeased astonishment. “I thought I shut the door.”

“Oh, no; you did not,” responded Bet, knitting away with her eyes upon her work; “but even if you did I could come in easy enough, without your knowing it. When Society ladies get gossiping over a fire, nothing short of a troop of dragoons can rouse them up, and it’s not the sound of their marching but the sight of their moustaches that does it then.”

“You are a very extraordinary girl,” said Lady Kissie, turning round upon her chair like a pivot, and beginning to rake the fire with a nervous hand.

“Am I?” answered Bet, without looking up; “well, *you* have a white string hanging out behind; but that’s the fashion, I suppose, or maybe it’s one you’re trying to introduce. It ain’t pretty though, and won’t take, I fancy.”

"Bet," said the voice of her stepmother, very stern and determined, "I wish you would go into my dressing-room, and write answers to those invitations I found when I came home. You can say," she added, as the girl rose slowly and crossed the room, "that I only returned this morning, and that a family bereavement prevents our accepting."

"I will," said her stepdaughter, knitting as she walked, "I'll tell them there's a man from Jay's specially down, with a hundred dozen of black-edged pocket-handkerchiefs to dry up the family tears."

And, laughing her little quiet inward laugh, she went out, still knitting, and drew the door after her with her foot.

"You can shut it," screamed Mrs. Blount.

"Thank you," she responded, as though it were a favour; and, catching a good grip of the handle, she pulled it to, with a bang that sounded like a musket-shot, and nearly tumbled Lady Kissie off her chair.

"Dear me! what a very singular girl!" exclaimed the agitated beauty, unfurling a purple fan. "How she must try your nerves. I can't think how you stand it."

"Yes, she is hard to manage," assented Mrs. Blount; "but she is useful, too, at times, and has never a word in presence of her father. How she ever came to be his daughter I am sure I can't think, for she is certainly not in the least like him."

"You won't easily get *her* off your hands," said Lady Kissie, smiling a little hard smile, and staring into the fire. "She is not the sort to be fancied in a hurry, or to marry in one either. Tell me more about this new girl; I want to know."

"I have not much to tell," was the rejoinder. "She is Irish to the backbone, but may be made something of in time, if I can only manage to keep her and Bet apart. Not otherwise, I fear."

"What about her manners?" inquired Lady Kissie; "wild as a hare, I suppose, or *gauche* to a degree?"

"No, neither. She seems quiet and not unladylike, I must confess; but quite unformed. I shall take her in hand at once, and strive to make some use of her."

"Is she pretty enough for that?" asked her ladyship significantly. And then the two ladies whispered together for a while, and laughed a good deal, and finally the visitor got up to go.

"Well, I shall help you all I can," she said, shaking hands;

"but I suppose she will be rather dull at first. Did she put on much grief while you were there?"

"Not the least. I never saw any young person so apparently devoid of feeling. She just handed me the keys—gave up everything to me—and went about with a face like a stone. Not a tear did she ever shed. I assure you I did not quite like it. It seemed cold and unfeeling in so young a girl."

"Pride, perhaps," suggested Lady Kissie, arranging her finery, prior to departure.

"Oh, if that's it, I don't mind," answered Mrs. Blount; "a month under my discipline will soon get her rid of it. Good-bye, my dear. I shall be delighted to see your friend to-night: charmed, I assure you." And she put up her cheek to Lady Kissie, who first pretended not to see it, and then touched it with the end of her cold nose, as though purposely to make her dear friend shiver.

On the landing she passed an open doorway, within which Bet was visible, dusting away at an *escritoire*, and blowing over the occupation like a stableman grooming a horse.

"What an invaluable housemaid you would make," said Lady Kissie, pausing with a pert little laugh; "but I should not think you would need to drudge in a house like this. Is it really from choice that you are always grubbing about?"

"Oh, yes; I like it," answered Bet, getting down on her knees to wipe the legs of a table. "You see we have no servants here, and father hates dust, so I take it off whenever I see it—which is pretty often."

"No servants!" echoed Lady Kissie, opening her great eyes, and believing that she had unearthed a grand secret; "your stepmother has told me that things *were* rather bad for awhile, but—goodness mercy! you don't mean to say they have actually come to *that*?"

"To what?" asked Bet, dusting away, with a ludicrous look about the corners of her wide mouth.

"To—to—what you said: that you have not got any servants?"

"No more we have," answered Bet, laughing; "nor has anybody else, that I know of. They are all ladies and gentlemen, or only fit for the backwoods: one or other. We are supposed to have lots of them, and to have nothing to do but give orders, and be waited on. I don't see it, however. How can one call a man a butler, who brings up dirty plates, and wipes them behind

your back with his pocket-handkerchief? or a woman a housemaid, who makes a fuss two or three times a day in your bedroom, and at the same time leaves a limp centipede in the bottom of your water-jug for four consecutive weeks? Oh, yes, I know them."

And out came the quaint little laugh again, while the red head ducked down beneath another spider-legged table, which the hands began to dust.

"Well, you are a wonder!" said Lady Kissie, half in admiration despite herself. "When I want a housemaid will you come to me?"

"No, I think not; I shouldn't suit you at all," answered Bet, still busily dusting; "I might go telling how I found the towels spoilt with rouge, and the carpet with violet-powder, and burnt corks all over the place. What would you say then, miladi, I should like to know?"

"What I say *now* is that you are a very impertinent girl!" exclaimed her ladyship, with extreme asperity. "Thank goodness, I have not to live in the house with you! I would not take charge of you for a thousand a year."

"Wouldn't you, though?" responded Bet, opening her green eyes like huge summer gooseberries, and growing grave in an instant. "Dear me! how terrible! I should be cheap at the money, then, seeing what a lot of queer things you do now to make up half the sum."

And, coming to the door, she shook her duster—apparently without forethought or intention—so close to the beauty's compressed little figure, that the particles flew all over her violet velvet draperies, and sent her bouncing down the staircase in a violent fit of indignation.

"I must tell you a little about these people we are going to," said Lady Kissie, as, a few hours later, she sat at a table in the right-hand window of the "Continental," toying with some luscious fruit, and chatting with young Crawslay, who had paid beforehand for the dinner which she and he had just consumed. "They have no end of money. Major Blount was among the most fortunate looters at Delhi, and has now, in addition, dropped quietly in for two estates, through the death of a cousin, who left no will or any nearer relative. The major is not at home just now; he has had to remain in Ireland, looking after the least eligible portion of his newly acquired riches. But

his wife—a charming person—returned this morning, and receives as usual to-night. She married the major in India, only five or six years ago, and is a most fascinating woman, with the loveliest hands and feet, and the most awful stepdaughter in the world—a fearful creature (the stepdaughter, I mean), with red hair and freckles, who laughs at everybody, and dusts the furniture, and talks about housemaids, and centipedes, and—and—*livers!*”

“What a nice, out-of-the-common sort of young woman she must be,” laughed the youth, swallowing a glass of chartreuse; “I hope we shall see her this evening.”

“I don’t know,” replied her ladyship. “Sometimes she appears; sometimes not; but never, I think, when her father is absent—so I fear you must restrain your impatience, and wait for another occasion.”

“Where *you* are I can wish for nobody else,” murmured the boy, fixing his love-lorn eyes upon her face. “But”—with a sigh—“I know I shall make you angry if I say any more; so, to change the subject, has Mrs. Blount any family of her own?”

“Yes; one son, by a former marriage. He is abroad with his regiment. In fact, he is never at home.”

As she spoke, she got up nervously from her seat; and her admirer, rising also, and assisting her with her muffling preparatory to departure, observed with somewhat of a shock that there was a varying and unwonted flush upon her unquiet face, and that, as though oblivious of her movements, she made an effort to thrust her huge fan into the dainty little hand-painted satin bag which she carried upon her arm, laughing the next moment at her awkwardness.

“You know this man?” said Crawshay, looking straight into her swerving eyes with his own honest ones—“you know him—and—and—*care about him?* Am I right?”

“No; wrong in both assertions,” she answered, recovering herself, and glancing boldly up. “I do not know him at all.”

“I am glad,” he whispered, tying the soft lace about her throat with almost trembling fingers. “It would kill me. I hope he may never come home.”

“I hope not,” smiled her ladyship, with her eyes again downcast.

“I am sorry I heard of him,” he murmured mournfully. “I shall torment myself. What is his name?”

"Oh, I have forgotten," she answered, curtly; and hurriedly finishing the task herself, at which he had been sadly bungling, she discharged a shot or two from the fowling-pieces at a perfumed exquisite with whom she had been carrying on a mute flirtation during dinner-time (unknown to her escort), and hastened from the room.

"Shall I tell the driver to wait?" asked Crawshay, as they went up the steps of the Grosvenor Place mansion. "Remember you have promised that I may see you home."

"Of course; but don't keep the cab, you goosey!" laughed the beauty, giving the bell a peal. "We shall not go away in a hurry, if it is pleasant here."

"Is it a dance?" inquired the youth. "I hope so. Keep the first waltz for me; won't you?"

"It is not a dance at all, you silly boy; only a very few friends for coffee and chat. And sometimes we play a rubber, in a very quiet way. I am sure you will enjoy it immensely—if we chance upon the right set."

"Oh! I understand," murmured the youth, a little ruefully—and followed his dainty leader into the gorgeously lighted hall.

"I shall not unwrap," she whispered, passing straight to the staircase, "until we see who is here. Possibly I may not care to stop."

CHAPTER V

NARROW and winding was the road he traversed—that big, sun-burnt, soldierly-looking man—with close-cropped brown hair, heavy moustaches, and firm, resolute, clean-shaven jaw. He wore a short coat and knickerbockers of light plaid tweed, grey worsted stockings, and heavy laced-up boots—a shooting-suit, so-called, yet he carried neither gun nor pouch, but swung his strong arms as he walked. The early summer sun beat down upon his head, and compelled him now and again to lift his soft travelling-hat and wipe the moisture from his forehead.

Not a soul did he meet in his long, lonely, weary walk ; and the magpies screamed at him from the tree-tops, as though the presence of humanity were an unwonted thing, and they resented the innovation.

Presently he paused, stopped, and looked about him, and at the same moment, from behind the stunted hedgerow on his right, a man's head and shoulders suddenly appeared. Perhaps the pedestrian had seen the flutter of clothing, or the outline of a figure through the ragged bush-fence, and so had purposely halted. If so, he was not likely to meet with much pleasantry, for a sort of growl or curse issued from the lips of the lurker, and the face that looked over the hedge was black and scowling. That of the traveller brightened considerably, however, as he confronted the strange figure, and asked,

“ Can you tell me the way to Nutley Grange ? I fear I have taken a wrong road.”

“ To *where* ? ” said the man, answering the question with another ; and, as he spoke, he seemed to stoop a little, and to make a sign to some person crouching below him. “ What d’you want ? ”

“ Mr. Bright’s place ; Nutley.”

“ He’s dead,” was the response.

“ Yes, I know ; but I want to find the place.”

"Well, I don't know a thing about it," replied the man. "Did you happen to come Menlough way?"

"I really cannot tell," answered the traveller, smiling a little grimly; "I have come a very *long* way; from Galway station."

"That's eleven mile, or close on it," said the man; "you must be fond o' walkin'."

"They told me Nutley was but five," mused the traveller, disregarding the concluding sentence; "but it is as I thought; I have mistaken the road. Is there any house near by, at which I can inquire?"

"I don't know none," was the ungrammatical reply; and the pedestrian continued his journey.

"See! Hi! young gent!" shouted a voice behind him—that of the peasant with whom he had been conversing—"you didn't happen to see a car on the road, did you—wid a white horse yoked to it?"

"No," returned the traveller, and walked steadily on.

His situation was not an enviable one. Unconscious whither he was journeying—entirely ignorant of what course he ought to follow—travelling a desolate and disaffected country, alone and unarmed—conscious that the very man whom he had accosted carried a gun, lying in wait (as he believed) for some unlawful purpose, and ready, perhaps, to deal out to him a horrible and unavenged death—another less strong than he would have hesitated before going further; but the brave heart within his bosom had never known fear. It had been exposed to such real dangers from shot and shell as are to be found and met with in the foremost din of battle, where the struggle for life waxes ever the most deadly and short—and so he was not afraid; he cared little for the chances of what might befall him, or that an enemy might be at his back.

The road lay rugged and bare before him, and as he advanced the country around seemed to grow wilder, with scarcely a trace of life or vegetation to be seen. On the right a rude wall, composed of loose, roughly laid stones, in which were many gaps, divided him from wild, uncultivated, and utterly barren lands—overgrown occasionally with rank verdure, and flanked by huge hills of chalk and stone, from which here and there sprang a stunted bush or tree, struggling for life where none seemed to exist; whilst over the tops of the desolate mountains, a solitary goat at intervals appeared, outlined in its wandering vagabondism against the clear blue heavens, and hanging its

horned head and lean pointed shoulders downwards over the jagged cliff, like a bearded patriarch, surveying the silence and desolation below.

On the left, a profusion of heaped-up boulders of rock—shapeless and huge—seemed cropping out of the soil, piled one upon another in endless and irregular masses—the finger-stones, perhaps, of Finn Fineen and other giants of the past, who may have rolled them thither, and used them when they wanted to while away their leisure hours. These, in some places, almost overhung the narrow roadway—seemingly poised upon the pinnacle of some projecting mound, and threatening to fall from their uncertain resting-beds, carrying destruction to the unwary passer-by. Their summits and sides were covered here and there with moss and lichens, and were draped in folds of clinging ivy, which sent its trails and offshoots—like wandering Hemeds—through many an interstice and gap.

Beautiful it was, in its wild grandeur—and the traveller, browned by the suns of many foreign climes, paused to gaze at things which were novel to his sight.

“How lovely and interesting it is,” whispered the romance within him; and then commonplace reality stepped in and said, “Very fine, indeed; but—hang it all!—I want a cottage, or a bit of plough, or an old gentleman in grey stockings and clump shoes, or a bare-legged damsel without any shoes at all—anything, in fact, even a wayside donkey, or a stray cock or hen, to show that life and humanity are somewhere within hail.” No use in wanting, however; so, pocketing romance, and giving sensible reality a pat upon the back, he took a leisurely pull at his pocket-flask and trudged on again.

Half a mile more of lonely pilgrimage, and a thin column of smoke, ascending a little ahead of him, proclaimed the welcome intelligence that a dwelling of some sort was nigh at hand; and presently he came within sight of it. Lying a little way in from the roadside, on the right, and surrounded by a miserable show of ill-cultivated and unproductive land, was a small cabin, or hut, of the very poorest description, without any attempt at windows, and with only a scant wretched doorway for the admission of light and air. A few attenuated fowls—long-legged and gaunt—were pecking among the rubbish which lay about, and a lean pig, with scarce energy enough to retain the curl in its tail, grunted unmusically over the contents of a three-legged pot.

On the broken flag which served for a doorstep, an old

withered woman was crouching, with a pipe in her mouth; while a younger one, who held a baby in her arms, stood by her side, shading her eyes with her hand, and gazing out upon the roadway. Neither of these women had more than a few wretched rags to cover her—both were barefooted—and yet they looked healthy and strong.

"Can you tell me the way to Nutley Grange?" inquired the traveller, pausing in his walk, and drawing near to accost them.

The elder women only stared. Probably she was deaf, and did not hear what was said. The younger one stepped back a pace or two, and for all answer looked over her shoulder into the interior of the dark cabin.

"Are you there, Pat?" she called out. "Here's a gent wantin' Nutley."

A short, square, stubby-bearded man, with an old blackened pipe between his lips, and wisps of hay about his legs, came forward in answer to the summons; and, as he pushed past the woman's elbow, she whispered hurriedly,

"One o' the new set, I suppose."

"I know nothin' about any one or anything," said the man, with a surly scowl, "so you'd best be goin' your way."

"I assure you," responded the traveller, smiling a little, and displaying a very handsome set of teeth, "I am only too anxious to be going, if you will be so good as to tell me *how* to go. I may as well say, too, that I am not in any way interested in the place for which I am looking. I do not know the present owner—not even by name—and merely want to speak a word with a person who used to live there before Mr. Bright's death. Can you direct me?"

The manly and truthful bearing of the speaker might well have laid to rest all existing doubts and suspicions; it evidently impressed the woman, for she touched the arm of her husband, and spoke a word or too in a low tone. But he was not to be won round by any show of friendliness.

"I tell ye I know nothin' about it," he reiterated, while the hang-dog expression of his face underwent no brightening aspect; 'g'wan out o' this, an' ax some other where. I'll have none o' your bloody sneaks o' gentlefolks hangin' about here. G'long now!" and he stuck his arms akimbo in the doorway, while the woman turned away, and began to hum a tune.

"It is no wonder," said the young man, in bitter accents of reflection, "that Ireland is cursed of all nations of the earth,

when her people wantonly insult even a passing stranger, who has done them no wrong."

"No wrong!" echoed the man, in frightful accents. "Aren't you English? don't I know it b' your tongue? and isn't the sight o' you worse than the pest'lence, and your shadda a blight on my house? Him as was carried from the place you're lookin' for was an Irishman, and a good landlord, rest his sowl! but not this new, sneakin', thievin' villain, wid his agent and his divilry, raisin' the land on us, and takin' the price o' blood to keep him and his brood in splendher in his own d——d country! But wait awhile, say I—there's a time coming when——"

"*Ahem!*" screamed the woman with the child in her arms, and was immediately seized with a noisy and violent fit of coughing, which drowned the remaining portion of the sentence, and at the same time shook the unfortunate baby until its head rolled round and round like a loose shirt-button just ready to fall off. "Oh, dear! oh! oh! I'm took bad agin!" she kept repeating, gurgling and choking, and turning black in the face, while the affrighted baby began to roar, and a deep-mouthed dog bayed hoarsely in an adjoining shed.

"I thought you said you did not know place or people," said the traveller, waiting until the din had subsided to address the man, and speaking with an angry contempt which he did not strive to hide. "I shall ask you no more. You, and others like you, have made this wretched country what it is."

And he turned upon his heel, with a flushed and wrathful brow.

"G'long quick now," was the man's only rejoinder, as, whistling shrilly, he stepped towards the shed. "Quick, or I'll set the dog on you next."

"No, you won't," said the woman, quietly, pushing him back as she spoke. "Let the gentleman alone. You're drunk to-day, and don't know what you're sayin'" And, with an admirable exhibition of skilful byplay, she held up one finger behind her husband's back, and, mouthing the word "mile," pointed the baby's arm over her left shoulder, as an indication of the way.

The young man understood at once, and, telegraphing her a grateful sign, turned his back upon the homestead, and strode forward upon the road.

CHAPTER VI.

HALF A MILE or so he traversed without adventure, keeping to the left after passing the cross-roads, and observing with pleasure that the country seemed to improve in appearance and prosperity as he went along. Patches of verdure began to show themselves, exhibiting refreshing signs of cultivation; while fertile spots, visible here and there in the hollows of the rocks, formed a pleasing contrast to the parched, desolate moorlands, unreclaimed bogs, and waste margins, where stunted furze and rushes, waving weeds, and miniature lakes of stagnant water had asserted their unremunerative sway. Signs of life, also, if not of complete civilization, became occasionally visible. A laden turf-cart passed him on the road—then a wandering collie—then a picturesque peasant-woman, in a scarlet cloak—and finally the sound of fast-trotting hoofs came upon his ear, and on the crest of the hill in front of him appeared a white horse, attached to a side-car, on which four men were sitting—two of whom wore constabulary uniforms, and carried muskets resting between their knees. The driver cantered his horse with injudicious swiftness down the steep decline, and as the animal stumbled, and made a brief struggle to recover itself, the traveller came alongside the car, and made an almost imperceptible sign to the gentleman who sat—in company with one of the soldiers—on the side of the vehicle next to where he stood. Instantly the driver's elbow was touched—a voice cried, “Halt!” and the gentleman, who was stout and florid, and had an amber wig and a glass eye, jumped off the car, and advanced to meet the signal-maker, who said,

“I feel bound to warn you, however prepared you may be, of danger on the straight road, which lies on the right, after you pass the cross. I spoke with a man there, who asked me about a car drawn by a white horse; and I think—indeed, am sure—that he carried a gun, and had a companion concealed

behind the hedge. There may not be anything in it, but I thought you had better know."

The gentleman with the wig listened attentively—tried to scratch his head, but could not—cast his fleshly eye upon the ground, and stared with the glass one at the sun, in a weird and unwinkable manner. He looked puzzled, but not surprised, and having expressed gratitude in a few gruff words, and exchanged a sentence or two with his companions upon the car (two of whom had got down), he remained talking with one of them, while the other—a handsome, dark-haired, massive-faced man, in civilian's dress—advanced in his place, and asked the pedestrian to state particulars of what had occurred on the road beyond the cross.

"I have really very little to tell," was the reply, "but I have reason to think that somebody is lying in wait for a vehicle such as yours seems to be, and my duty is plain—to put you on the watch. I see"—glancing at the guard—"that you are not unprepared for danger, but there can be no harm in knowing where to look for it. I shall not detain you further. Don't go that road, if you can avoid it by choosing another; keep a steady look out; and I wish you a good day and a safe journey."

"Stop a moment," said the gentleman to whom the warning was addressed, and who was evidently much impressed by it. "I have not thanked you yet, and am, I fear, a very bad hand at that sort of thing. In short, I am a man of very little talk—but I should be glad, sir, to know your name, and I hope that we may meet again."

"My name does not matter," replied the young man, carelessly; "I am a friend *and a brother*, that is enough. When we meet—if ever we do—we shall, I fancy, have a recollection of having met before. Tell me, please, am I close to Nutley Grange?"

"Quite close—within half a mile. First place on the right after you pass the finger-post on the other side of the hill. I have just come from there, and can drive you back, if you are willing?"

"No; I shall walk," was the reply. "Shall I be thought impertinent if I inquire whether you are the new owner?"

"Not the owner, only his agent," answered the personage addressed; and, with a pleasantly uttered "Good day," he rejoined his companions on the car, and the vehicle, with its four occupants, whirled away out of sight, while the traveller looked after it for a moment, and then plodded on afresh.

At the finger-post he met a man driving a lot of Connemara

ponies, and, learning from him that he was close to Nutley if he kept well to the right, he did so, and came upon a beautiful level road, with a footpath at one side, beyond which were pasture lands—and a thorn hedge at the other. Traversing this for a few hundred yards, he at length arrived at his destination, and paused for some moments in contemplation of it. If he expected—as doubtless he did—to behold an imposing entrance-gate, with stately piers, lodge, carriage-drive, wooded lawn, and all the other accessories usually pertaining to the residence of a gentleman of wealth and position in Ireland, he must have been surprised, and perhaps disappointed; for there was nothing of show or splendour in the outward appearance of Nutley Grange. Three or four foot-worn steps led up to a small gate, the entrance to a porch, from which extended away, on either hand, a short, neatly kept, and nicely gravelled pathway—flanked on the inner side by an ivy-grown wall, which, at the end of twenty yards or so, jutted out and ended the pathway—a pretty bordering of early primroses forming a finish to the outer or road side. The porch itself, which was so little removed from the highway that a passer-by might have touched it with his stick, was of very dark ancient oak, minutely carved, and in a state of beautiful preservation; whilst over it—standing out in bold relief—was a carving, also in oak, of a dragon's head stuck with a spear, an exquisitely wrought coat-of-arms, and, in curious old English letters, the warning words, "*Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,*" together with the date, 1543.

Lifting the latch of the gate, the young man stood within the porch, and paused in mute wonderment at its quaint beauties. In size about ten feet square, it was seated on each side with polished oak, while walls and roofing displayed elaborately finished carvings of the loves of Bupalus and Calamar, supplemented by the fine works executed by the former for the city of Smyrna, and a representation of his quarrel with Hipponax and subsequent melancholy fate.

From beneath one of the seats a huge mastiff got up with a low growl, and seemed ready to resent the intrusion upon his solitary privacy; but no two eyes that ever were created could look honestly into those of the new-comer and not at once assume a friendly expression, for his were honesty and friendliness themselves—and as the cumbrous animal sniffed around him and received his pats and caresses, the big paws—as large as those of a young lion—were reared against the young man's breast, while the swaying tail beat thundering knocks against

Calamar's graceful draperies, and swept the Smyranean masterpieces with unceremonious prodigality.

"I wish you would lead the way for me, you fine fellow!" said the visitor, expressing half involuntarily his real thoughts and desires; and the dog, as though comprehending, with another frisk and whine stalked majestically on in front, and led him across a short, open-air, neatly sanded sweep, to another similar although smaller porch, within which was a door, with a brass bell at the side of it. At this door the mastiff paused, and gave utterance to a short, ringing bark; and, as the caller at the same moment rang a summoning peal, a venerable, white-haired butler appeared in answer to it.

"Is this Nutley?" was the traveller's first inquiry, almost dreading a negative reply.

The servant bowed his head.

"Yes, sir, you are right."

"Is Miss Bright still here?" was the next query; and, as the answer to this was "Yes" also, the old butler took a closer survey of the new-comer, and the latter a closer one of his own boots. In short, he looked down—greatly to his own discomfiture. "May I ask, is she at home—in the house? Can I see her?" he next inquired.

"She has seen no company since the master died," was the grave response; "but if you'll give me your card, sir, I'll take it to her. Maybe she'll see you, and maybe she won't. I don't know."

"I fear I have not a card with me," was the young man's reply, as he slapped his pockets with a comically perplexed look. "It is not my custom to carry such things about me; but, if you will say Major Deverill, I think—I think—it will be all right." And he pulled quite violently at his long moustaches with one hand, and at the mastiff's ears with the other.

The servant walked respectfully before him, through a wide hall covered with foreign skins, and hung about with foxes' heads and brushes, hunting whips and horns, and other varied tokens of the chase.

"I do not know the present people," hesitated the young man, as the ancient domestic unclosed the door of a handsome library, in which a dim, religious light prevailed; "I mean that I do not wish to see anybody—except Miss Bright."

The servant bent his head.

"I understand, sir. There is nobody else here exceptin' the colonel, and I think he's out about the grounds."

Saying this, he quietly withdrew and closed the door, and the visitor found himself staring at a bust of Pallas, which was mounted on a pedestal in front of him. The room was shelved to the top, and contained many dark recesses, which the ghostly light made it difficult for the eye to explore. The dog had entered with him, and, having found a friend, seemed as though he meant to stick to him: an intention by no means distasteful to the object of his regard. It was evident that some unusual nervousness was over the young man, for, although many comfortable seats offered inviting resting-places after the fatigues of his long journey, he disdained to sit down, and took up an excited and anxious walk between Pallas and the door—watching the latter as though he expected every instant to see it unclose, and the object of his visit to enter thereby. Five minutes passed away thus, and then it opened, and the old servant appeared alone at the aperture.

“Miss Bright is not in the house, sir,” he said; “but she may be in the grounds or gardens. I have sent to look.” And again he disappeared.

“Eh? Hey! I say—who’s there? Does anybody want me?” exclaimed a sleepy, querulous voice from the dimmest corner of the room; and, as the officer turned his surprised gaze that way, a tall man, with a spare, stooping figure, got up drowsily from a couch, and began to rub his eyes, as though he thought they must have deceived him. “Hallo! who have we here?” he exclaimed. “I have been asleep, I believe—tired from tramping round this beastly hole. Can’t you say who you are?”

And, with an angry, impatient hand, he hurriedly drew up the heavy blind, and cursed when it fell again, obliging him to lift it a second time. Light and sun streamed in upon him as he did so, and showed out remorselessly the many lines and furrows in his pale, cadaverous face, the touches of white upon the scant dark hair, and the thicker sprinkling of it through the full, rather pointed beard. As the two men confronted one another, both fell back with expressions of displeasure and surprise, and “Colonel Blount!” and “Major Deverill!” was all that either of them said. There was complete silence for two or three minutes, during which the heavy breathing of the mastiff and the light-hearted songs of the birds without were alone heard. Then the elder man advanced, and extended his hand.

“We had better meet as friends, as we have met at all,” he

said, constrainedly; "though I confess I am entirely taken aback. May I ask, without ceremony, what has brought you here?"

"Certainly. And may I ask the same of you?"

"I think I have an undisputed right," was the rejoinder, delivered with a short, dry laugh, "seeing that the property belongs to me. Now yours, pray?"

But Deverill paid no heed. He only fell back a step or two, and said,

"*You* the owner of this place! You! You!" repeating the words in accents of mingled incredulity and surprise. "Surely no; you are not serious—I mean, there must be some mistake."

"If there is, I have yet to find it out," was the cool response. "The law, sir, is plain enough and clear enough for even idiots, like some of us, to understand. I am master here."

"Then Mr. Bright made you his heir?"

Colonel Blount bent his head, with a lurking smile hovering about his thin lips.

"Yes, that is just what he did, or what the law has done for him. It is much the same thing to me."

"You mean, perhaps, that he died without a will?"

"Precisely"—with another bend—"he did."

"Then you were a relative of Mr. Bright's?"

"Yes, a relative; you are right."

"Had he none nearer?" inquired the young man, whose face looked pale and frowning.

"No, sir, none,"—spoken with extreme asperity. "May I inquire whether you are envious of my good fortune, such as it is, or have you come here to dispute it?"

"Neither," answered Deverill. "I am puzzled. I—I am taken by surprise." And, leaning his arms upon the mantel-piece, he drooped his head upon them in weary thought.

The elder man walked twice or thrice up and down the room, and then paused, regarding him from beneath his beetling brows.

"When you have quite recovered your surprise," he said, sneeringly, "and have slept long enough to refresh yourself, I shall be glad to know to what fortunate circumstance I am indebted for the honour of your visit—or, in other words, what the devil has brought you here."

"I have come," answered the officer, rousing himself, and speaking with all the honesty of his nature, "to see Miss Bright. I am waiting here now, against my will, until she comes to speak with me."

A peculiar and most disagreeable smile curled the lips of the listener : but Deverill's eyes were cast down. He did not see it.

"Ah! to see Miss Bright?" repeated the colonel, stroking his bearded chin. "Good. May I inquire your business with *her*?"

His tone was so sneering that the young man turned fiercely round, and looked him full in the face with a very angry expression.

"It can in no way concern you," he replied, "therefore I shall not tell you. There is nothing singular in my visit."

"No? Then you have been in the habit of coming here, and of meeting this young lady?"

"I have never been within these doors in all my life until to-day," was the petulant rejoinder, "and I shall leave as quickly as possible—in short, as soon as I have seen Miss Bright."

"Indeed! May I be told whether or not she has been expecting this call?"

"She has not."

"Ah! I thought so." And the speaker looked fixedly out of the window, with a face as unreadable as a mask.

"Why?" demanded the young man, while the blood rushed for a moment to his cheeks. "Your reason, please, for thinking so."

"Well, had she anticipated so great a pleasure, she would probably not have gone out."

"Then she *is* out—further, I mean, than about the garden or grounds?"

"Assuredly. She has gone for the day."

"Strange that the servant did not say so," exclaimed Deverill, in a quick tone of suspicion.

"He did not know," was the icy rejoinder, "but I did. I saw her off."

"Then you mean me to understand that she has gone a distance—that I shall not see her to-day?"

"Precisely. It is unfortunate, is it not? If you have any message it shall be delivered, and I should much like to know—very much—how you became acquainted with the young lady."

"Had you asked me civilly at first, I should have told you without reserve," was the young officer's rejoinder; "for, heaven knows, there is not much concealment in my nature. However, I have not any object in making a mystery. Last winter I was stationed in Dublin; Miss Bright and her guardian were there also, and I met them several times. Then they left—we lost

sight of each other—and I heard no more about them, beyond a passing mention, until somebody at Woolwich told me that Mr. Bright was dead, and yesterday, at Queenstown, where I had been stopping for a day or two with some friends, a local paper of distant date, with a detailed account of the accident, chanced to fall into my hands; so I came off at once, to see Miss Bright, and perhaps—I hoped—be of some use to her in arranging matters here. Of course I knew nothing of how things were. How could I? I never wrote: nor did she."

"Humph! Then you and the girl are quite old friends?—lovers, perhaps?"

"No, not lovers. I never hinted that."

"And yet you take a pretty long journey on the chance of seeing her?"

"I should think nothing of twice the distance if I could be of any use to her," was the ingenuous reply. And the listener smiled again, even more disagreeably than before.

"You are very kind," he said; "but I don't fancy the young lady will stand in need of your services. I have done all that was necessary, which was not much."

"How is she placed?" inquired the young man, with almost a tremble in his tone. Evidently he feared the reply.

"What do you mean?" asked Colonel Blount, resting his tall, lank form in the depths of an easy-chair, and kicking the mastiff, as it sniffed his feet; "I scarcely understand. What is it you want to know?"

"And yet my question was plain. What is her future to be? How is she provided for? Does she purpose remaining here?"

"Three questions together," said the calm colonel, counting them off upon his fingers—we shall take them one at a time, if you please—one by one—that will be best. Firstly, then"—touching his forefinger—"her future: what is it to be? very hard to tell, my dear sir; matrimony pretty surely. She is young, and may be good-looking by-and-by. I shall do my best for her. Secondly, what is her provision? Well, the letter O will best express it; absolutely nought. Thirdly, will she remain here?—decidedly not. The place is mine now."

A wince—a momentary silence—and then came the inquiries—

"Where, then, will she live? Is she likely to go abroad?"

"If *we* go: not otherwise. She will live with us. I cannot give her the means to go travelling about on her own account,

nor would it be fit. Oh, no! she stops with us; that is fixed."

"*You* not give her the means!" repeated Deverill, knitting his brows hard, as he stared at the man before him. "Must her going, then, depend entirely upon your generosity. Has she absolutely nothing at all of her own—not even a sum of money laid by?"

"I have not heard of any," was the placid rejoinder, "nor have I reason to suppose that she had any banking transactions during her guardian's lifetime."

"Do you mean to assert that she is entirely penniless?" demanded the young man, in a quick, sharp tone of pain. And the listener smiled for the third time, and coughed away a little chuckle, too, behind his lean hand.

"Entirely," he replied, suavely. "She is altogether dependent upon me. Yes, altogether;" and he rolled the words under his tongue like sweet morsels, and folded his arms close upon his breast, as though hugging the idea of the poor girl's desolation.

"Then she is left a beggar!" said Deverill, bitterly.

"Oh, no; not exactly that," answered the owner of Nutley, smiling like a satyr. "She won't beg—dear bless me, no! Nothing so mean, I can assure you. She is only dependent upon charity; that is all."

Deverill's head sank low upon his breast, and his eyes—hitherto flashing—fell to the floor.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "this is too dreadful."

"It is hard," acquiesced his companion, every word coming out with cold, metallic distinctness, "very hard. When a man loses his heart to a girl of reputed fortune, and suddenly finds out that the money was all a myth, it is very hard indeed, and dreadful too. I quite agree with you."

The speaker's arms were still folded upon his narrow chest, his scoffing lips were drawn back, his grey eyes were fixed like shining steel upon the changing countenance of the man whom he mocked. But, in an instant, the arms fell to his sides, the lips relaxed, the eyes flashed fear and anger both; for a face of terrible wrath came so close to his own that he winced, and pushed back his chair.

"If you were a man," was hissed in his ear, "you should answer to me for this affront; but you are not. *What* you are, you know! and so do I. That is enough; too much for you, perhaps, when the time comes to tell it. Now, listen to me.

Since the day you married my mother, you and I have met but twice. We did not, on either occasion, say many civil things to one another, or part very good friends. Time has not mended matters. You are no better than I thought you then; and I, perhaps, am worse. We may not meet again, for a good while to come; but there are two things I want you to remember. The first is, that——”

“Miss Bright is nowhere in the grounds, sir; the gardener has sent word,” said the old servant, opening the door, at which he had several times knocked in vain. And, having delivered his message, he closed it again behind him.

“I told you so,” said the master of Nutley, with a dash of triumph in his tone, as he turned to the visitor with his imperturbable smile again in full play. “Pray forgive the interruption, and go on. What is it that you wish me to remember? I like playing schoolboy at this time of my life, and learning lessons, as of old. It makes me feel young again.” And he rubbed his skinny hands together, and stretched and again folded the fingers of each, as one sees a parrot do with its long, grey claws.

Deverill looked at him for a moment, with withering contempt.

“I want you to remember,” he repeated, “that, when my father died, he did not leave me dependent upon anybody, man or woman; therefore, fortune is of little consequence to me. Secondly, that if fate has placed you as master here”—and again he winced perceptibly—“and has given you what ought rightfully to belong to this poor girl, you are bound, by duty and honour both, to deal generously by her, and not to thrust her from her home, if she wishes to remain in it. And thirdly, bear in mind, that, although for my mother’s sake—mark what I say, *for my mother’s sake*—I would wish to show you consideration, I shall forget ALL ties so soon as I learn that any unkindness has been shown to this most unfortunate young lady, or any restraint put upon her movements. Now, act as you please, and think *what* you please of *me*. I am satisfied.”

Without another word, for he waited not for answer, the young officer took up his hat, and, unrested and unrefreshed, went forth again upon his solitary way. But, even as he departed, he heard the hideous little laugh of the man in the chair, and saw him counting on his fingers, one, two, three, as he mumbled over the triune lesson which he had been warned never to forget.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE lay with her face buried in the long, cool grass. No one near her—unless, perhaps, the spirits of the dead, among whose graves she lingered. They might possibly have hovered nigh, and kept her unknown company. Who shall say that they did not? There are more wonders and mysteries on earth, as in heaven, than our shallow philosophy wots of. A spirit may hover in the air we breathe; our most secret solitudes may be peopled by the invisible: spirits whom, though gone from our sight, we yet love and venerate. In our walks they may be behind or beside us, in our banquets they may sit at the board—and the chill breath of the night wind, which steals through our unclosed windows and stirs the curtains of our bed, may bear us messages from lips that once pressed kisses on our own. Scoffers at things spiritualistic, and unbelievers in the awe-inspiring mysteries of an occult world, mock at the belief—so beautiful and comforting—that the shades of the departed are hovering about us here. Yet, surely they are so. Why, if not, is it that with each of us there are moments when over us there creeps a sensation of awe, overpowering but undefined? Why is it that at times—perhaps when about to commit some unworthy act—we shudder without a cause, and feel the warm life-blood stand still in its course? Has some invisible hand touched us? Do unearthly wings fan us as they flit by? *Are the dead too near?* Has the soul an intercourse, unshared by the body—an intangible communion—a language of dread and power, shaking to its centre the fleshly barrier that divides the spirit from its race? Ah, who shall tell of these things? What is our belief, or yet our unbelief? We are as children in the dark. Like circles in the water, our researches weaken as they extend, and vanish at last into the measureless and unfathomable depths of the vast unknown. We tremble in a shadowy and terrible void, peopled with fancies. Life is our

real night, and the first gleam of the morning which brings us certainty, is *death*!

So thought the girl, as she lay—the only living thing, save the dog, her companion—in that desolate country churchyard; no palpable form present with her, no house within her view, except God's house, the old church, with its ivied tower and lichen-covered walls, within which her childhood had worshipped, and her girlhood's faith been strengthened and confirmed. How well she knew and loved the old place! The little white gate, with its rusty hinges and useless lock, through which the villagers—the townspeople, they liked to be called—passed on Sundays, in all their holiday clothing, with prayer-books in their hands. The well-worn gravelled pathway, winding and odd, upon which the obstinate grass would insist on growing, and which in winter-time was so dreadfully covered with sandy and muddy pools. The ancient church porch, always undergoing repairs, yet ever in a tumble-down condition, with the queer little nook above it, mysterious, ivy-choked, and dark, from which as a child she had once seen an owl's face peep out, with great saucer-like eyes, which frightened her; the numerous slabs and headstones in the well-filled churchyard, and the still more numerous unmarked mounds—she knew them all quite familiarly: could have visited every separate spot with her eyes shut; but this one special grave, beside which she was resting—across which her arm was flung, as if in fond and clinging embrace—was terribly new and strange. Yes, strange, although visited every day, sometimes day and evening too; but the time of its making seemed but as yesterday—was as a spell gone by! There were no flowers upon it yet, nor was it railed in, or marked by cross or stone. This was no sign of disrespect. It was but the fulfilment of a wish. Mourners in abundance there had been, and were: the just dead have many such; but they have but one monument worth having: the bosom which loved them *best*. The spot where the hearse had rested, the green turf beneath, the surrounding trees, the grey tower of the old church, all had witnessed the childhood, the youth, the manly prime of the dead so sorrowed for and beloved; the same bell had rung for his birth as for his death; he had lived and grown up among his countrymen; the peasantry whom his hand fostered and fed had loved him in life, and had been his chief mourners—all save one—when he had come to be laid where she, that chiefest mourner, now lay stretched in the bitterness of

a sorrow from which there was no arousing her, yet which to the living was so little displayed. She stood, as it were, on the very threshold of life; young, yet with youth scarce tasted ere embittered—comely, with a comeliness marred by grief; for is there in the world a weariness so utter as the feeling that everything is unchanged, except the *one being* who was the soul of all—that the world and all things pertaining to it are the same, yet that its sunshine has departed?

What a lone grave it seemed to be, so separate and apart! He, the sleeper, had once said that he would wish to be laid in that particular spot, away from others, removed even from some of his own kith and kin. He might have cherished a fancy, or might have had reasons which he never told. It did not matter: the wish had been spoken, and it was remembered and carried out. He was alone in death, as he had loved to be in life; and the only two beings—the human and the brute—whom he had cared to have about him in his living hours, were those who hovered near him as he rested in his narrow bed.

For quite a long while the girl and the dog lay there without moving, the two black forms, still and motionless, pressing down the gently waving grass. Then the village children, released for an hour from school, came trooping along the little path, and, with shrieks of happy laughter, went jumping over the graves, which were to them but playthings, and finally sat down in groups to make daisy-chains of the little star-like blossoms which grew in white and yellow clusters, pink-hued and beautiful, over a portion of the grassy sward. Very still and silent they grew, and the laughter on their lips was changed to quiet whisperings, when they beheld the sable-clad figure which they knew so well, and, with hushed voices and sobered steps, they sought to steal away unobserved, that they might not break what they believed was the mourner's rest. But the girl was not asleep. She knew they were there, that they wanted to play, and that her presence checked their gladness; so she rose up, smoothed the unconscious clay on which her arm had so lightly lain, and, with a few pleasant words to the shy and blushing children, placed her hand within the spaniel's collar (for he wanted to linger where his instinct told him his master lay), and, turning quietly, took the pathway to the little gate.

She was young and very fair, that mourning girl, with a world of gentle sweetness in her pure, sad face. Her brown hair, brightened into gold by the sun-rays, left her forehead

unconcealed, and waved prettily on each side of it, until, having reached the tips of the small ears, it was tucked away behind them, and gathered into a pretty bronzed knot at the back of the shapely head: a style of hair-dressing which, although charmingly becoming, was thoroughly unconventional, and would have sent Lady Kissie and her satellites into irrecoverable fits.

She had soft, loving hazel eyes, which looked ready for tears as for laughter, yet were strangers to both. Her cheeks were white, her lips nearly so—for sorrow had paled them—but nothing, not even the heaviness of grief, could steal the beauty from that tender and eminently girlish face.

She passed out upon the narrow, unfrequented roadway, the dog close by her side; walked a few yards, then stopped and hesitated. On the summit of a distant hill, a vehicle appeared in sight, as though coming her way. It was very far off, but youth is clear-sighted. She could not be deceived. It was a car drawn by a white horse, and four men were seated on it, and the driver was in front. The girl turned rapidly, and, getting over a stile, crossed a field or two, and jumped a small cutting, flanked by a gapped hedge, which divided the pasture-land from a wide patch of plough.

Keeping along by the headland, and walking fast, as though some nameless dread were upon her, she tugged hard at a locked gate, and finding it securely fastened, sent the spaniel before her, and scrambled through the broken fence on one side of the barrier. A wild spot was that in which she found herself; no sign of human habitation in sight, or of any living thing, save rabbits, in untamed abundance, darting hither and thither among the thick, coarse ferns which formed a carpet underneath the spreading trees. In the distance the great hills rose up, sun-touched and grand—a simple yet sublime picture of a vast solitude, an unpeopled wilderness—the woods, the mountains, the face of Nature, cast in the fresh yet giant mould of a once unpolluted world; and, amid these silent yet eloquent works of the great God, the spirit of the mighty Creator reigning and brightening over all.

Trampling down the rank verdure as she plodded on, but evidently knowing her way, the girl and her mute companion journeyed through the unfrequented wood, and emerging, after a tiring tramp, into a brighter and more open space, followed a narrow, beaten pathway through some apparently waste and

undrained lands, and came at length to an abrupt turning, which brought them upon a more encouraging scene, and led them, after an interval of brisk walking, into a shady, beautiful, and not altogether deserted country lane.

It was quiet and green, and certainly little frequented by travellers; the only traffic through it being that of farmers, hinds, and ploughmen, with now and then an old red-hooded woman with a basket of eggs or butter to sell, or a young lass with laughing eyes and freckled face, bedappled with the shadows of the fluttering leaves, gliding noiselessly along beneath the trees; the Phyllis of some rural Robin, who was waiting for her, perhaps, at some leafy tryst.

On the ground the grass grew plentifully, almost concealing the deep rough ruts, made by the passage of hay-carts and harvest-wains; so that, if the unwary wayfarer did not mind well his steps, he might find himself suddenly let down a good deal lower in the world, before he was at all aware of the likelihood of his being so. There were whitethorns and blackthorns, brambles, hazels, and alder-trees—not in full glory, certainly, but clustering thickly together in the hedges on either side, in company with young ashes, old pollards, and middle-aged birches—very silvery and graceful, and blown about a good deal by the whimsical wind.

There was something very much alive in that lane, too—a company of ragged donkeys—common donkeys, they might be called, without meaning any pun—strolling leisurely about, with marks on their backs, suggestive of panniers—other marks, too, terribly suggestive of the stick—and that meek, deprecating, subdued, if not utterly crushed look, which donkeys always have, and which says so plainly, “Don’t whack me! be patient, and I will do my best.” If children and costers would only look into the poor little weary faces, and read the lesson which they teach aright, there would be fewer jaw-wrenchings and pommellings for poor Neddy—fewer tender spots upon his ill-used person, and more of them in the hearts of the human, yet how *inhuman*, creatures, who treat this helpless, despised, and withal most useful and long-suffering race, as though it were not a portion of the creation of that Beneficent Being who has sent for the use of man much that he shamefully abuses.

The donkeys in Meadow Lane were happily not of the most maltreated class. Hard usage they had doubtless received from time to time, but their servitude was not everlasting. They had a free day now and again, and this was one of them. Placid,

gentle, well-conducted members of society were they, who, if they had ever had any wild-oats to sow, had sown them long ago, and were ready to make amends now by devouring any quantity of oats, wild or cultivated, with which in their wanderings they might chance to meet.

A little bit scared they were at first, when the solitary black-clad figure appeared in the lane—an intruder upon their privacy—especially as her canine companion thought it necessary, for the credit of his race as well as his position as caretaker, to bark, and pursue, and make a great show of hostility against the harmless herd.

But the unwonted commotion was soon over; the donkeys, finding that it was all humbug, kicked out playfully, and then resumed their grazing; the spaniel returned to his place by the side of his young mistress; and she, feeling tired and heated by exercise, sat down upon a fallen tree, with a bower of brambles and creepers all about her, and leaned her head wearily upon her hand.

“Oh, Sancho! dear, *dear* Sancho!” she murmured, as the spaniel, with a dog’s loving sympathy, thrust his cold, moist nose against her cheek. “How I wish you could help or advise me. I have no one to tell me what to do! Not one; not one!” And she sighed wearily. The sorrow of bereavement was not the only one she had to bear. There was another, scarcely less hard—harder in one way, inasmuch as there was nothing, no future hope, to sanctify it.

From her bosom she took three letters. Two of them had evidently been read and re-read, many times over. The third was apparently of very recent date. They were all in the same writing—a fine bold hand.

She opened out one, and bent her head over it, for the fiftieth time at least. It bore an earlier date than either of the others, and ran thus :

“DEAR MISS BRIGHT,

“I have tried to reconcile myself to separation from you—to forget my own presumption, and your too-evident want of regard for me. It is useless. I cannot forget. If I offended you—as I have too good reason to believe—during our drive on that fateful evening, I am deeply repentant. I meant no affront. How can I best assure you of this? I spoke then, because my opportunities of doing so had been so very rare; you never

gave me a chance of seeing you alone when you could possibly prevent it. I want you, also, to believe that the endearments which I presumed to offer, and which you so resented, were meant in sympathy, no less than in love. I allow that I offended, and nobody regrets it more deeply than I do myself; but, remember, you requited the offence—such as it was—by spurning me in the presence of a stranger, and appealing for protection, where you really stood in need of none. Let this be sufficient for my punishment. It ought to atone.

“When, a few months ago, I asked you to be my wife, and you rejected me, your action was doubtless influenced by the idea that it was presumptuous on the part of a country attorney to pay addresses to the reputed heiress of a wealthy county gentleman. Perhaps it was. Your guardian, I fancy, thought so, and bade you reject me, or, at all events, counselled you to do so. I thought this at the time, and think it still. You were young to have formed any other attachment; nor had my attentions, up to a certain date, appeared displeasing to you; but, doubtless, Mr. Bright had higher aspirations, and by his advice you were guided. This is my conviction—so deeply rooted that to shake it would be difficult, if not impossible. Things have changed since then. You are no longer under restraint, nor are you—(pardon me for saying what may *sound* unkind)—any longer in your former position. So far as I can see, you will henceforth be entirely dependent upon strangers, who care nothing about you, and will probably wish you well away. With me you would have a happy and an honoured home. Not a rich one, perhaps, but sufficiently so to enable you to enjoy every comfort, and more luxuries than fall to the lot of many.

“For the second time, then, I offer you my hand, and with it my whole heart. That I can have no interested object in doing so cannot fail to be apparent. I have nothing to gain, except yourself—which is all that I want, or wish for. Forget my offence. I also have been offended. Let that condone. Forget *all*, except that I love you, and am ready to do everything in the power of man to make your future a happy one.

“Anxiously awaiting your reply, I remain,

“Dear Miss Bright,

“Yours very faithfully,

“W. JOYCE JESSEL.

“To Miss Bright, Nutley Grange.”

CHAPTER VIII.

"OH, if this were but the only one!" sighed the young letter-reader, as she refolded the paper and laid it dismally in her lap, where the spaniel sniffed and mouthed at it, as though he longed tremendously to eat it up. But his mistress saved it with her sheltering hand. Perhaps, if he could have eaten up the writer of it, she might not have offered so much opposition. It would be hard to say.

Then she took up letter number two, a somewhat longer epistle, and proceeded to consider it, leaning her chin thoughtfully upon her little black-gloved palm, and puckering her pretty forehead into something very like a frown, as her eyes rapidly scanned the closely written words. There was certainly enough in them to make her feel considerably disturbed.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I am in receipt of your courteous note. What a lady says must, of course, not be doubted; therefore I am bound to credit your assurance that your late guardian never interfered with your decision respecting my proposal, or in any way influenced your answer. This circumstance does not, however, serve to benefit my case, but, on the contrary, considerably augments the hardness of it, as showing that the refusal originated with, and was carried out by, yourself. I do not think you will deny that up to a particular time—the date of your visit to Dublin last December—you certainly did not discourage my attentions. I am not going to assert that you actually encouraged them, nor am I unwilling to believe—what you have averred—that your regard for me was grounded upon the fact that the late Mr. Bright cherished a friendly feeling towards me, and, in short, considered himself under some obligations to me, connected with legal matters, of which I do not intend to speak. The fact, however, remains patent that, up to the 18th of December last year, you and I were (to say the least of it) excellent friends. From the period of your return

to Nutley—the 3rd of March in the present year—(you see I have the dates pretty accurately) your manner completely changed. It cannot have been due to embarrassment, consequent upon having refused me, for *I* displayed none, although, in my position as a rejected suitor, it might have been expected. One surmise alone is left me; I have a rival! This I shall accept as fact, if not contradicted by *you*. I ask you, once more, not finally to reject me. Let the matter rest for awhile. Give me time to win you—as you say you are not already won. Believe me, I can wait, if you only say that there is hope. I pressed the subject in my former letter, because I wanted to save you from knowing, even for one hour, what it was to be a dependent. Let me, then, strive to win you piecemeal, if not in any quicker way. Our opportunities for meeting will in future be many and frequent; we shall, in fact, be thrown continually together. Colonel Blount has appointed me to a position of trust. The exigencies of my new post will necessitate my constant presence at his house: at least, I can so arrange it—and as you are to be one of his household, we shall see a good deal of one another. Were you determined to reject me, this fact would be *somewhat embarrassing for both*. The matter rests with you; in your hands I am content to leave it. For the third and last time, I now address you: not for the purpose of hurrying your decision, or to press you for an immediate reply, but to know whether I am to wait, and HOPE.

“Let my probation be as long or as short as you please. I shall not in any case complain; but I would have you remember that we can *not* be ‘friends!’ The friendship of which you speak is simply out of the question. Pray, bear this in mind. Nor must I omit to say, that, when you offer me your *gratitude*, you distress me. I have loved you against my will: therefore I merit no thanks. Once you have decided, and have made known to me your decision, we must be lovers heart and soul together, or—strangers. There can be no mid-course.

“I am, very faithfully yours,

“W JOYCE JESSEL.

“P.S.—I had almost forgotten to reply to your friendly inquiries respecting Dr. Tenterden Jones. You are aware, I presume, that the cold from which he was suffering on the sad occasion of your visit to his house, turned to a dangerous fever, through the worst of which I assisted in nursing him. He is now quite convalescent, but has scarcely yet recovered the full

vigour of his mind. I have notified to him your kind interest in his illness; but, as it dates from that unhappy evening, his ideas are as yet a little hazy on the subject of all connected with the catastrophe which we so deeply deplore.

“W. J. J.

“To Miss Bright, Nutley Grange.”

A very nice letter this, and from a man so handsome, intellectual, and courteous, that very few ladies could have felt otherwise than flattered by the receipt of it. She was hard to please, this girl, if the writer of so sensible an epistle had failed in making an impression upon her heart. Perhaps he *had* made one, and that she was thinking the matter well out; for with one hand grasping the letter, and the other supporting her cheek—against which the spaniel still insisted on laying his uncomfortably wet nose—she sat quietly ruminating, with her eyes unconsciously fixed upon a linnet’s nest, which was built in a darkling bush of white-thorn, in the very thickest part of the hedge, just over a little miniature brook, which ran rushing by between a couple of great stones, all green and slippery with the moss of perhaps a hundred years. She was not thinking in the very least about the nest, although staring at it with apparently fixed attention, until presently a bird flew out of it with a saucy chirp. He was a very funny little bird, just getting a respectable coat upon his back, and something to cover his head, and having very decided indications of a tail in perspective.

The girl looked at him, at first without interest, and then began to smile a little, and to watch him with something like aroused attention, as he leaped to a spray directly above the nest, and, giving two chirps in honour of the event, flew to the top of a high bush, and in a very loud strain proclaimed to all whom it might concern that he had set up on his own account in the world. His impudence and clamour soon attracted Sancho, who at once began to stare and slobber, and to wonder what on earth he could be, or whether it would be advisable, or, in fact, worth while, to “go for him;” and, while the two were engaged in gazing at the young adventurer into the mysteries of a world so utterly strange, the girl sprang suddenly up, with her hand upon her heart, and the bird flew away with a startled rush. What was it? Something, and yet apparently nothing—for although she gazed and waited, and even stepped across the little brook, which was brawling away and tumbling about between the two old mossy stones, not a vestige of anything,

human or otherwise, could she succeed in discovering. Imagination plays us many a passing prank.

She sat down again in the same spot, and took up letter number three. It was terribly short and concise.

"MADAM,

"I am, of course, forced to accept your final decision. For both our sakes I am sorry. *Mine*, because my heart and my vanity are alike wounded. *Yours*, for a reason most important to you, which I do not at present feel called upon to state. If, however, you wish to learn it, or to change your mind—the first to be consequent upon the second—I shall be pleased to receive a communication from you to that effect at any time within the next three months. After that, *it will be too late!*

"I am, Madam, your obedient servant,

"W JOYCE JESSEL.

"To Miss Bright, Nutley Grange."

The girl's arm fell to her side; her head drooped; her attitude was one of the deepest despondency. There was a profounder meaning in those letters than her simple mind could fathom.

"Why should he care for me?" she kept repeating. "What is there in me to make him urge me thus? I have not seen enough of him to make him love me. Money, I have none. Position, what!—a poor dependent!"

She roused herself and got up, placed the letters again within her breast, and told the spaniel to make ready, as they should be on their way.

The next moment, a start and an exclamation proclaimed that something strange had occurred. The blood rushed in a glad torrent to her face, and her hands, nervous and trembling, were outstretched to grasp two strong ones, cordially extended to greet her.

"Major Deverill! Can it be true? How—when did you come here?"

"I shall tell you all about that by-and-by," he answered, cheerily. "Are you awfully surprised to see me?"

"*Awfully.*"

The blushes were chasing one another over her fair face, like flittings across a summer sky.

"And just a little bit glad?" he queried, still holding her hands.

"Much more than a little. Very, very glad indeed."

"Well, can you spare me five minutes or so for a chat, or are you in a tremendous hurry? I have come a long way, you know."

"I am not in any hurry at all; have absolutely nothing to do; and was going home, as I came out, in a fit of idleness. My days are dreamt away. You have come to waken them up."

They sat down on the fallen tree which had been her previous resting-place; and the spaniel, cheated for a time of his walk, whined discontentedly, and then lay down at his mistress's feet, awaiting her pleasure.

There was a moment's embarrassed silence. Every sentence which Deverill had prepared—and they were many—to serve as the commencement of a conversation, died away upon his lips. He had meant, above all things, to sympathise; every stereotyped phrase that ever was invented had come into his head, and gone out of it just as rapidly. The girl made no mention of sorrow, and he himself felt none at the moment. So what could he say, or do, except gaze upon the sweet young face which, when the flushes faded from it, looked so very frail and white. Not a single word that he had intended to speak would vouchsafe to come—so he blurted out at last a very commonplace sentence:

"I have been up at the house."

She turned her shy eyes upon him.

"Oh! and did they send you here? How strange! I did not tell them where I meant to come, and took this way more by chance than anything else."

"I was not sent here at all, but was told, on the contrary, that you had gone out for the day, and were not expected to return until—heaven knows when. Not before night, at all events."

"How extremely wrong of Davys!" she exclaimed, a displeased flush tingeing her brow. "I have never known him tell so great an untruth! It was mere invention."

"Who is Davys?—that old butler-fellow with the grey head?"

"Yes."

"It was not he who told the story. I had it direct from another!"

"From whom? You may tell me without hesitation!"

"Well—I had it from Major Blount, whom, by courtesy, we call 'colonel!'"

"Why, how could he say so?" said the girl, innocently; "I

have not seen him since yesterday. He is delicate, and does not get up until late, so I was out before he came downstairs this morning!"

"Never mind," said Deverill. "It was a mistake—of mine, perhaps. Now that I have found you, I am quite content."

"But how *have* you found me? Who has directed you?"

"Nobody, really. Pooh, it's not worth telling. I felt very wicked and angry when leaving Nutley—disappointed, you know, and all that kind of thing—so I thought that, as I was down here, I'd have a look (you won't mind my referring to it) at a grave where some one for whom I'm awfully sorry has been laid; so I made my way there, and of course I didn't know a bit where to find the spot, but some youngsters who were playing about pointed it out to me, and I heard from them that you had just been there."

"Well; and then?"

"Then I asked which way you had gone; but they all clamoured together, and confounded me, so I set off on my own account, and got lost in all sorts of queer places. It was looking for the public roadway that brought me into this lane, and I was just strolling along on the other side of that hedge, when I spied you through the bushes."

"And why did you not speak?"

"I scarcely know. I think I wanted to look at you first; besides, you were reading, and it would have been rude. You looked up one time, when a little beast of a bird made a row of some sort, and, by Jove! I funked, and hid myself like a ridiculous coward. Then you got up, and were going, so I thought I had better lose no more time. That is the whole story. Are you dreadfully disgusted with me?"

"No. No, indeed! But you have not told me why you have come to Nutley."

"To see you."

He bent to look into her eyes, but they fell to her lap.

"Are you angry with me?" he questioned; and she looked up, with a vivid blush.

"No. How could I be? It is a kindness that I can never forget."

"To myself," he murmured, turning a little away and pulling at some ivy-trails that were hugging their rustic seat. "I wanted to see you, and so I came. Mere selfishness, I assure you."

"I shall never forget it," she said again; "how few would have done so much!"

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, making light of it. "It is positively nothing. I was at Queenstown, so the journey was very little to talk of. I would do more than that, if it could be of any use."

One of the trails was in his hand as he spoke, and he began to tear it ruthlessly to pieces, while his face grew stern and dark.

She watched him a moment in silence, and then said,

"I want to know more—several things. How long can you remain?"

"So long as you are kind enough to keep me company here. When you dismiss me, I shall calculate my time, and act according to the summing-up."

"But shall you not stop at the Grange? Has Colonel Blount not invited you?"

"My dear girl, I am going back to Galway, now that I have seen you, and shall start for Dublin to-night, if I can catch a train. If not, to-morrow morning."

"But can you not stay? I am sure the colonel has asked you to do so; he is so kind to everybody."

Deverill winced, and scattered a handful of ivy-leaves upon the ground.

"I really cannot," he replied. "You are very good; but it is impossible for me to return to Nutley."

"Not even for dinner? *Surely* he has invited you? I cannot—because—because—I am no longer mistress there; but, tell me, have you not been *asked* to return?"

The young man stood up with an embarrassed air.

"You must believe what I say, Miss Bright, that it is absolutely necessary for me to go."

"And how are you to get to the station? Where is your vehicle?"

"I have none; I shall walk."

"Walk? Oh, no! It is seven miles, even by the shortest route. How did you travel to Nutley?"

"As the tramps do: on my feet. I think nothing of walking. It is only pastime."

"But you can get a horse from our—from Colonel Blount's stables; or a trap, if you prefer to drive."

"No. Thank you very much; I shall walk."

"Let me at all events ask, have you had luncheon?"

"I really never eat it."

The girl made an impatient gesture.

"There is some mystery in all this!" she said.

CHAPTER IX.

DEVERILL'S honest eyes fell to the ground, and fastened themselves steadfastly there. He beat his foot upon it, too, in a vexed, embarrassed kind of way—angry that it did not open and hide him from the gaze of those other eyes, equally honest, which seemed as though demanding an explanation of what was certainly most difficult to comprehend. Very angry he felt with himself, also, for the flush which he knew was on his brow; a terrible tell-tale, and an unwonted one. He had stood undaunted before fire and sword, yet in the presence of this weak girl he felt thoroughly unmanned. For a brief space neither spoke, and the faces of both looked pained and ill at ease.

The girl was the first to break silence.

"There is, I repeat, some mystery," she said, in a vexed, fretful tone. "Are you certain that you really saw and spoke with Colonel Blount? Could it have been anybody else?" Her thoughts were pointing to Mr. Jessel, whom she had seen at the library window as she passed it on her way out that morning. "What was he like?" she added.

"Precisely like himself. I have not made any mistake."

"And am I to understand that he has shown you absolutely *no civility*?"

"I have not said so. I required none. We soldiers are queer, rough sort of fellows, and have a way of refusing attentions when offered, except"—with a bow—"when the offer is from a lady; then we avail ourselves of it, in horribly greedy fashion. Do not worry about the colonel, Miss Bright. If he is kind to you, it is all that I want or wish for."

"To me? He certainly is. Everything in the old place belongs to him now, and he could turn me from it if he pleased; but, so far from doing so, he has offered me a home in his house, and has placed no limit upon my stay."

Deverill looked steadfastly at her.

"I know all about that," he said, "and am glad, for your sake, to hear that you have found him what you say."

He sat down once more, and began to trace patterns upon the mossy ground with the end of his blackthorn stick.

"You are not going to remain at Nutley?" he presently said.

"No; but I hope I shall often come there. London will not seem like home; it will be new and strange to me—among strangers. I have been so little out. But Mrs. Blount is charming; she was here for a few days, and I like her extremely, although she did not care much for the place."

"Then she has been to Nutley, and you and she have met?"

"Yes. I wish there was time to tell you all about it. I quite dreaded her coming, never having had a lady in the house before; but she was like a mother to me at once. I hope you will come to know her, some time—soon. You would like one another, I am certain."

"I do know her," he answered, still marking out strange tracings upon the russet carpet which Nature had spread at their feet.

"Do you really? How *glad* I am! Do you know her well? I mean, is she a friend, or merely an acquaintance? There is such a difference."

"A friend, I hope. She is my mother."

The girl started to her feet in the excess of sudden and complete surprise; and the spaniel, who was resting there, followed her example, and, being thus abruptly disturbed from his dream of a rival (and consequently a foe) lurking in a kennel close by, could not realize that there was nothing in it, and, giving himself a big shake by way of waking up, trotted off to look for and dispose of his adversary.

"Your mother! *your mother!*"

It was all that she could say. On her face there was a scarlet flush of joy, as well as of astonishment. She actually laughed with pleasure, for the first time for many weary weeks.

"Your mother!" she repeated. "Let me look at you. Yes—no—you are not the least bit like her. Perhaps you are only jesting with me, to see how credulous I am."

"No, on my soul. I was never more entirely in earnest in my life."

"Then I shall see you often! And the colonel?—he is surely not your father? Tell me all about it. I cannot understand."

"My father is dead. My mother married a second time. Colonel Blount is my stepfather."

"Then it is no wonder that you said you were not mistaken in knowing him to-day. I now begin to understand something of the reason of your coming to Nutley. You came——"

"To see *you*," he quietly interrupted.

"Yes. They had told you all."

"I assure you, no. My information was quite accidental. I was not aware until this morning of so much as the *name* of the new owner of Nutley, or that it *had* an owner, other than yourself."

"How strange! I should have thought your mother would have told you."

"I have not seen her for a very long while."

"No? But of course she writes to you?"

He writhed his head a little, and stretched a hand to draw her again to her seat.

"I am not a good boy, Miss Honor, and am a very bad correspondent. Consider the fault mine, and overlook it."

"But you will go and see her now, will you not? She loves you, I am sure."

"She used to," he said, with a sigh; "and does still, no doubt. More than I deserve."

"And you love her in return?"

Her eyes questioned him more closely than her words; his were cast upon the ground. Who shall say what thoughts were passing in his mind? reflections which that word "mother" conjured up; faults, fancies, bitter and sweet, good and evil—soulful sunbeam and sickening shade—the gentle, guileless memories of merry childhood, and the surging, angry passions of a manhood shadowed more than most. With each and all that little word was interwoven.

What wonder that it should be so. Even amid the bitterness of a life the *most* embittered, a man does not soon forget the mother who nursed his infancy, and to whom his childish griefs were as her own. He may go out into the world—may run through every stage of belief and unbelief—may become absolutely apostate—may rub out his conscience, and destroy all that was most perfect in his organization—but there is one picture which he cannot efface. Living or dying there will rise before him the image of that remembered being, whom he called "mother."

"You have not answered me," Honor's gentle voice said in his ear; "but I shall not press—there may be something you would rather not tell. Are we, however (I should wish to know), likely to meet in town at some time or another—or is it indeed good-bye?"

"I shall contrive to see you, however it is managed," he answered, after a brief hesitation. "That is, if you continue to desire it."

"Then I am *not* to expect to meet you at Grosvenor Place?"

Her face looked wistful, and very sad.

"No, dear Miss Honor. I am afraid not. But I cannot speak for certain. I may come—some time—under certain circumstances which I cannot well name to you. Trust me a little, and think of me as kindly as you can, until we meet again. It won't be long, I hope."

"And you are going now?" she murmured, for he had risen, and was holding out his hand. "This visit has not been very satisfying, I am afraid."

"To me it has been. I have seen you, and have learnt what in time I should have come to know. Better now than then, perhaps."

"What do you mean?" she queried.

"Do not ask me. Say only—good-bye."

"There are many things that I would *wish* to ask you," she said, simply. "I want a friend to advise with. There are some points too perplexing for me; I know so little. Many a time, these last few weeks, I have thought of you, and longed to tell you my worries. It seems selfish, but you have been so good to me. I have not in the least forgotten those happy Dublin days."

He looked pleased and pained together.

"Nor I," he said; "but pray don't say I am good; I feel so awfully the reverse. I'm very glad indeed, though, that you wished for me; it was quite reciprocal. Now, what have you got to tell me, or to ask my wise advice about, before I go?"

"Oh, it would take too long. Nor am I quite certain that I *could* tell you, or that it would be altogether right."

"Gracious me! What a prologue! It must be something *awful*! Here, we will string some of these berries together to serve as beads, and imagine my pocket-book a breviary. I shall be your father-confessor." And with mock gravity he bent a listening ear.

"Nay, you must not laugh at me," the girl said seriously; "for I really want to ask you a question, without occupying much more of your time; so walk with me as far as the high road. We can part there, if you *must* go back. Sancho, come along. Where are you, bad dog?"

He was not far off, only rummaging among the moss and briars for stray crumbs dropped by the village children in their wanderings through the lane. Having failed in unearthing an enemy, he had come back to his friends, and, frisking by the side of his mistress, declared himself, in canine fashion, to be quite ready for a walk.

Together the three strolled on, their pathway widening as they went, and the sequestered beauty of the scene giving place to more open grandeur. Over the stooping tree-tops tall hills rose on every side, covered with the glory of the early summer sun, as if Nature rejoiced to grant her bulwarks as a protection to wild freedom in a solitude beautiful and profound. By the wayside ran a small clear stream, sparkling with the smile of day, and ever and anon from scattered shrubs and fragrant herbage came the sweet music of birds, and the hum of the wild bee, flitting by upon the calm scented air.

Deverill sought his companion's hand, and drew it through his arm.

"Our time is nearly up," he whispered.

Evidently she had been thinking and pondering how she could best express what was in her mind, and, as in all such cases, stereotyped phrases fell to the ground, and the matter came out in all its rugged baldness.

"I want to know—do you think it would be wicked to marry if one disliked the person very much?"

"I should say decidedly it would. Dislike grows terribly."

"Well, without absolute dislike. Say indifference."

"That merges into it in time."

"Then you think it a sin to marry without love?"

"Yes. All sorts of evils grow out of it. But why do you ask? Are you contemplating a loveless marriage?"

A little chilly shudder ran over her frame.

"I hope not. I fancy it would be worse than death. And yet—I wish you could advise me."

"I will try, if you care to tell me about it."

She placed her hand over the signature of the third and

shortest of the letters which she had been reading when he found her, and held it to him with averted face.

"Am I to read?" he asked.

She said "Yes," and he did so. An easy task—it was so brief. He drew in his lips when he had finished, and inquired,

"Have you answered this yet?"

She murmured a negative reply, and returning it to her hands, he said,

"Two things seem pretty clear. You have already refused the writer, and your doing so shows that you care nothing about him."

She bent her head without looking up.

"You are at least indifferent to him?"

"I am—quite."

"Then tell him the truth—now, if you have not done so already. He may think it is something else. Honesty is always best."

The girl hung her head very low indeed.

"Yes, I know, and I have not used any deception. He knows precisely how things are. Will you tell me what you make of this?" and she pointed out the passages: "*A reason most important to you*:" and "*If, however, you wish to learn it, or to change your mind—the first to be consequent upon the second—I shall be pleased to receive a communication*," &c.

He studied the words attentively, pausing in his walk to do so, and then went on again, with a meditative brow.

"Was this man," he said, "whoever he is—I don't know, nor do I *wish* to know—was he, I say, acquainted with your late guardian, Mr. Bright?"

"Yes; he knew him very well indeed."

"Did business for him, perhaps?"

"I should say so. They were frequently together, at all events. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing; or not much. I cannot well explain my thoughts; but I think, were I you, I should write to him at once, and demand—or at all events ask for—an explanation."

She shook her head.

"Do you not see what the letter says: '*The first to be consequent upon the second*?' He offers me a sort of bait, or bribe. I cannot understand it. What ought I to do?"

"I can think of nothing better than I have said. Now, tell me: Is he a gentleman? I don't mean, had his great-grand-

father a family-tree—that is all rubbish; but is he a gentleman in the truest meaning of the word: one in thought, in mind, in action? I don't quite applaud his holding out a kind of threat over you, but 'all is fair in love,' they say. Have you, in short, a good opinion of the man?"

Honor paused. Recollections of a lonely drive, on a dusky spring evening, in a shut-up, close-blinded carriage; of a strong arm encircling her waist, of passionate words breathed pantingly in her ear, of hot lips pressed burningly against her cheek—these things flooded her mind, and checked for a while her utterance.

"I know him so slightly," she at length murmured.

"*Slightly!* By Jove! Then he must have great confidence in himself. You can, at least, tell me what I asked. Is he a gentleman?"

"I suppose he would be considered one," was all she could say.

"Good. If he is, you will gain your purpose. Appeal to him, and he will respond. If not, I should be inclined to regard this letter as an attempt to extort a promise from you, and so should pass it over. At any rate, you are not to sell yourself for a myth."

They were very near the high road now, and both felt that the time for parting had arrived. Honor replaced her hand within his arm, and tried to utter a few words of thanks.

"I feel so much better for having told you," she said; "I wish you were oftener near me, to give me advice."

"About love matters?" he questioned, with something of a comic look in his eyes.

"Not particularly. I shall have but few, if any, as I am not likely to go into society for a very long while; but about everything else."

"Very well. Let us begin. My first advice is, keep out of the way of the heartache; never fall in love; it is most unsatisfactory work."

"You speak from experience?" she said, with a slight shade of pique in her tone.

"Of course I do. I am going on to my fortieth year, and——"

"We are all that," she interrupted, with a cold smile, "and to our fiftieth, if we ever reach it."

"Yes, but in earnest; when a man passes thirty he may begin

to look back. I have fought a queer lot of battles in my day, and the retrospect is not particularly cheery."

"Yes, I know. I have heard of——"

"I'll warrant you have *not*, for I kept them pretty close, I can assure you. I carry more signs and crosses under the breast of my uniform than ever appear on the outside of it. Now, I must leave you. I am awfully sorry, but here is the high road, and our ways lie apart."

Ominous words to close with.

He held out his hand; she gave him hers without a word—stricken dumb, as it were, by something he had said—and so, with fingers clasped, but hearts full, on both sides, of misunderstanding and doubt, this man and woman parted. When to meet again?

"He does not love me; not even the little bit I hoped—or he would not have told me of his *crosses*!" was the girl's reflection, as she wandered slowly back along the road to Nutley Grange. "Well, it is a part of my lesson. The world grows more sorrowful every day!"

"It's quite clear she doesn't care a rap about me, or she wouldn't be thinking of that other fellow!" the man muttered to himself, as he strode along—eight miles an hour fashion—in hopes of catching a train at Galway Station. "Well, I'm glad I haven't quite broken my heart about her; though, on my word, she's awfully sweet and nice. But, confound it! I'm deucedly hungry, and thirsty too. My stepfather's character for hospitality has gained nothing by this visit of mine."

And whilst, later on, he—the male soliloquist—regaled at Black's on underdone beefsteak and bottled beer, she—the girl—stood at the old lattice window of her bed-chamber at Nutley, and fed on less substantial things: the thoughts and fancies of her own gloomy spirit. Watching the birds flying homeward to their nests set her longing that she, like them, could, after the roving of the day, turn at evening to a resting-place and be still. Thus are we the dupes of our senses. Using them to gather pleasure and expectation from external surroundings, we forget to note what punishments we prepare for ourselves; the remembrance which stings, the hope which deceives, the affections which promise us rapture, yet yield only despair—and the thoughts which, if they constitute the healthful action, make also the feverish excitement of the mind. Was there ever yet a sick man who did not dream, in his delirium, everything that the wisest have said?

CHAPTER X.

"How is your liver to-day, Bet?" asked Mrs. Blount of her step-daughter, a week subsequent to the party in Grosvenor Place at which Lady Kissie had introduced her boy adorer.

"Oh, it's just mixed middling! I took a blue pill and put on a mustard-leaf last night," responded Bet, beginning to hum a frightful attempt at a tune, as she concluded her sentence.

She was putting the finishing touches to a white wool dog, and fastening yellow glass beads into its head, by way of eyes.

They were both—the two ladies—seated in the breakfast-room; the time was eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Mrs. Blount was busy with a lapful of letters, papers, bills, and telegrams, which had been pouring in, in lavish profusion, from quite an early hour of the morning.

Her costume was a robe-à-chambre of pale rose-coloured cashmere, festooned with a quantity of cream lace, and cream and rose ribbons. She had a rose silk handkerchief knotted loosely about her head, and on her feet were velvet slippers of the same warm hue. Her cheeks also had roses on them, but whether natural or otherwise is not for the historian to venture. She was altogether extremely magnificent and languid, although most wonderfully wide-awake all the while.

Her step-daughter's dress was unpretentious, not to say plain: a green-and-white striped gingham, like ribbon-grass, terribly ill-made, but clean—which was all that could be said for it.

"What do you want with my liver?" she presently said, asking the startling anatomical question with astounding abruptness.

"Oh, not very much," replied her relative; "but you always say you can't be amiable when it is out of order, and I want you to be particularly so when this evening comes round."

"Good!" responded Bet, stitching pink leather on the dog's nose, and pinching it with her fingers to shape it; "I'll be sweetness itself. What's in the wind now, I wonder?"

"Well—your father wrote on Thursday to say that things had been brought pretty straight in that outlandish Irish hole, and that he might manage to be home to-night; but he is always so very uncertain, that I have said nothing about it. I did not believe he would be here for at least another fortnight. However, he has wired this morning from Kingstown, to say that he is on his way."

The recipient of this news whistled a bar or two of "When Johnnie comes marching home again," and stitched two black beads upon the pink leather, by way of nostrils for the dog.

"I must air his nightcap," she said, "and put his medicine-chest in order."

"Yes, but I want you to remember," said Mrs. Blount, "that this girl—Miss Bright—is coming with him; and I wish her to have a very pleasant reception."

Bet's face, as she looked up, was like a book, of which the most comic page had been turned. She opened her green eyes to their fullest extent, and twisted them surreptitiously round the corner to where a big family Bible and Prayer-book lay resting upon an oaken shelf. Could Mrs. Blount have been studying them—have turned suddenly religious, and be building her conduct upon new principles, set forth in a volume usually in very trifling request amongst the Grosvenor Place household? No, not exactly that; for, piled on the top of the sacred writings, appeared quite an array of tomes of a different order: "Whitman's Whist," "The Game of Poker," "How to make a Book on the Derby," "Beauties of the Ballet," "Success in Lotteries," "Barclay on Baccarat," together with sundry other specimens of light literature, highly calculated to improve the intellect and benefit the mind of the inquirer after truth.

"You see," went on Mrs. Blount—who had her morning repast beside her, a cup of chocolate and a plate of figs—"you see the girl will naturally feel a little bit strange, and really it is only like a duty to make her coming home as bright and agreeable as possible."

"Well, that would have been *my* idea," responded Bet, still with eyes and mouth very considerably open, "but I heard you say, a week ago, that you were sorry she didn't break her neck when the man broke his."

"Dear bless me! I never heard such a thing in all my life! To whom did I say so, pray?"

"To that kissing woman with the floury nose."

"If you allude to Lady Kissie," said Mrs. Blount, loftily, "I am quite sure she would confirm what I say, that no such improper conversation ever passed between us."

"Oh, yes, I daresay she would," acquiesced Bet, stitching on the dog's tail, which would insist upon going crooked, despite all her efforts. "Society ladies don't see any harm in telling lies; and miladi in particular has an elastic conscience in that respect. I'll never forget," she went on, laying down her work and laughing her quiet little inward laugh, "I'll never forget the day you sent me with her to the Croftons' luncheon-party. 'Oh, dear! she couldn't eat a bit,' she said; 'never had any sort of appetite.' Hadn't she though? When we got back here, where she could take off her waist-belt and undo the end buttons of her bodice, I'm blest if she didn't get hold of a cold duck before my very eyes, and the way she wrecked that bird was something to remember."

"Oh, really," exclaimed Mrs. Blount, fidgetting uneasily in her chair, and dropping the fig which she was about to put into her mouth, "you talk too fast entirely, and—and *exaggerate* very often. You ought to think twice before you speak."

"I will," said Bet, with a very sage look.

For awhile both were silent.

The mistress of the mansion was deeply occupied with the contents of her lap, and the maid was collecting her wools, and otherwise going through a process of "tidying-up," to mark the completion of her labours. Whenever Mrs. Blount "pished," or "poohed," or uttered a contemptuous "pshaw!" Bet knew that it meant a bill; when she lay back gracefully in her chair, and contemplated a small-sized note or card, it meant an invitation, or a box for the opera, or some other charming thing in which her innocent soul delighted.

"I have been thinking," she presently said, pausing with an especially fine fig poised upon her fork, and looking quite as sweet as the fruit, "that it would be very nice, in fact quite the correct thing, to invite one or two people to come round and have dinner in a friendly way, this evening; so as to have a little company to welcome Miss Bright. Intimates, you know, whom one could ask in a hurry. It would be pleasanter than being quite alone. What do you say?"

"I'm thinking"—replied Bet, staring at the fork and at the fig also, while it remained on it, and did not vanish into Mrs. Blount's mouth,

"Well, what is your opinion?" again inquired the matron, chewing away in the most contented fashion.

"I'm thinking," again responded Bet.

"Thinking *what*?" cried her stepmother, sharply. "Give me the benefit of your thoughts, whatever they are. You can be sensible enough when you like, with all your oddities."

"You know you bade me think twice before I'd speak," said Bet, laughing noiselessly, as though the mirth were all inside, "or I should have told you, after the first thought, that you ate a fat maggot with that fig! But they're awful wholesome things, and, only for the lots of 'em that pa eats with his cheese, his liver might be worse than it is."

"I don't believe a word you say!" ejaculated Mrs. Blount, reddening with annoyance; "you think to vex me this morning, but you shall not. I am determined to keep in good humour. Now, as I have not yet finished my chocolate, and am not inclined for writing, will you just be good enough to scratch off a wire to Lady Kissie, and another to that little sandy-haired man, Sir Tittleum Tibbs, and say that I hope they will come and dine in a friendly way, as I have just heard that my husband will be home this evening. Stay, you had better *write* to Sir Tittleum, because I want you to tell him to be sure to come, and some other things besides. Say there will be a great attraction."

Bet looked at her with a queer mingling of shrewdness and displeasure on her pale, freckled face.

"So *that's* the game you're up to!" she said, as she walked to the table where the neglected Bible lay, and lifted a desk from it, to commence her task. "It won't pay, though, this time, I'm thinking."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Blount, with asperity; "I never can make you out."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Bet, quietly; "you know me pretty well now, as I know you. What I mean about this 'attraction' business is, that there's no use in baiting the trap a second time; old birds ain't easy caught with chaff."

"I'll write the letter myself," said her stepmother, speaking in a vexed tone, and pushing aside her cup preparatory to fulfilling her threat.

"No, you won't," answered Bet; "I know how you'd go ahead. You never yet had game in view that you didn't startle it by shouting out before you had your gun properly cocked! Here, I'm getting on. What hour shall I say for dinner?"

"I don't know," responded Mrs. Blount, fretfully; "you have quite put me out with your talk about *maggots*, and guns, and all sorts of horrid, odious things. I quite forget even at what hour that vile Irish mail comes in."

"I know that. Kingstown, 7; Holyhead, 11; Euston, 6.25," said Bet, speaking in a monotone, as though reading from a railway guide; "I may be a quarter or so wrong, one way or the other, but that don't matter. They'll turn up about seven o'clock."

"Bless me, child! Not at all!" cried Mrs. Blount. "It's quite half an hour's drive from Euston here, and there's the routing about after the luggage to be got through first. That girl will have *bales* of boxes, you may be sure, and half-a-dozen mangy dogs, and a hamperful of cats as well, I suppose, unless Blount has had the good sense to get 'em all drowned before starting. Animal mad those people were, and had the house like a menagerie, with everything in the world in it, except, perhaps, weasels. Even the gardens were alive with animals: those nasty things with shells on their backs, and others worse again. I thought I had dropped my melon-shaped work-basket one day in the summer-house, and stooped to pick it up. What do you think it was? a vile hedge-hog. I might as well have gripped a handful of bayonet-points, and Blount only laughed when I told him—just as you are doing now—and that idiot of a girl said 'Poor thing!' meaning the prickly beast. But, wait awhile. If she brings any of them here, I'll throw 'em out through the window pretty quickly."

And, having worked herself up to a high pitch of excitement, the excellent lady swelled and puffed a good deal, and began to wipe her face with her pocket-handkerchief, which article gained a considerable amount by its encounter with the flesh, and looked quite rosy.

Bet leaned her elbows upon the table, and smilingly chewed her pen.

"You'll tell me the dinner-hour this day week, perhaps," she presently observed.

"Oh, dear! I forgot," cried the matron, recommencing upon chocolate and figs. "Half-past seven will be too early. We had better say eight."

"Very good. Eight o'clock," said Bet, working away at papers and telegram-forms, with her left elbow spread out across the table, her head nearly resting upon it, her eyes looking side-

ways at her task, and her right leg protruding a yard and a half beyond her chair, with a tremendous expanse of white stocking showing well above the carpet-slipper, which hung half-way off her foot. Her stepmother made no comment upon her attitude, nor offered to correct it. She knew the girl too well for that.

"Shall I tell the kissing thing to bring that boy of hers?" asked the amanuensis, twirling her pen with one hand, while she scratched her instep with the fingers of the other. "She won't come without him, you know."

"Yes, I suppose you had better," acquiesced her stepmother, in a slightly doubtful tone; "as you say, she won't care to come alone—though *I* don't care about having him, if it could be avoided. How much did you say he won from me on that Saturday night? And he never gave me a chance of revenge since! It's the way with these youngsters. Never mind. I'll have it to-night. Invite him by all means."

"You don't really mean to play before the new girl, quite so soon, do you?" asked Bet, pausing, with suspended pen.

"Why not, pray? She can't get on with any 'goodie-goodie' nonsense here, and may just as well get into our groove at once. Nothing like it."

"For imprudence," said Bet, quietly; "but you know best, of course. I'm sure pa won't approve, though; he's a better sportsman than you, and never frightens the timid game. Can't you have music? Give us a stave yourself, and ask big Major Blowout to come and sing 'Put me in my little bed.' That will be nice and edifying."

"Very well," agreed Mrs. Blount, looking cross, nevertheless, over the proposition; "we can try it for once. They'll all clear off early, thank goodness, having no supper and no cards. Tell Lady Kissie to come at seven, if possible," she added. "I want her advice about one or two matters. She has *such* admirable taste."

"For kickshaw cookery and boys!" murmured Bet, *sotto voce*, and scribbled a postscript: "The Step says you're to come at seven."

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW hours later, and the results of telegram and letter-sending became apparent. First to arrive was Lady Kissie, attended by her youthful escort, and charmingly got up in pale-blue silk, with a profusion of soft creamy laces, foaming all about her, and one exquisite rose nestled becomingly amongst them, just below her fair chin. It was only an artificial one, manufactured to appear extremely natural and sweet, an exact picture of Lady Kissie herself. To do her justice, she looked remarkably pretty, for she was (as has already been said) one of those women who look their best at night, in the soft sanctity of rose-shaded lamps or carefully modulated gas, and where no such awful innovation as electric light has found its way to make havoc of their charms. The fowling-pieces were in splendid order, too, burnished and bright, and well primed with small shot of a "death-and-destruction" nature; for, whenever Lady Kissie accepted an invitation to Grosvenor Place, she always counted on chances of meeting with stray game, which, or whom, it would be advisable to aim at, bring down, and pluck, according to her accustomed excellent fashion.

Young Crawshay, handsome and debonair as usual, carried her big feather-fan, and her bigger bouquet, and her laced pocket-handkerchief, and the swansdown cape (always brought with her to evening parties, in case her shoulders should feel cold, in the event of her being assigned a draughty seat at dinner or supper, as the case might be), and looking altogether what he was—the willing servitor of Beauty.

Mrs. Blount was in the drawing-room to receive her guests, attired in lavender brocade, so extremely tight about the waist that it was with difficulty she arose from her seat, or, having arisen, sat down again. She wore an imposing array of jewels, and a lace head-dress, so dainty and becoming that she looked, in the (purposely) dim yet warmly glowing light, more like a handsome and imposing young matron than the woman who had, some

time before, arrived at that dreaded five-barred gate called Middle Age, and who, instead of lifting the latch and walking composedly forward, had crept shamefacedly through the adjoining gap, and stolen sighingly away upon the off-side. She was one of the many, the very, very many, who can see no loveliness in life's autumn-tide, who would fain have it always spring, forgetting that there are golden leaves among the russet, and that the harvest is the gathering together of hitherto scattered good.

Scarcely had the two ladies greeted one another, in their usual fashion of exchanging a little of the pearl-powder upon their respective cheeks, when another startling knock resounded at the street-door.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed the hostess, keeping her feet, in order that she might not have to undergo the troubles consequent upon yet another stand-up—and looking a little bit disturbed. "Did you hear a cab?"

No; neither Lady Kissie nor her attendant cavalier had caught the sound of such a vehicle.

"Then it can't be the colonel," said Mrs. Blount; "for Miss Bright travelled with him from Ireland to-day, and of course she will have no end of luggage—at least two growlers full, I expect. Who on earth can it be at this hour?"

They listened, and, the house being very still, heard a sound as of footsteps ascending the stairs.

"It's men!" said Lady Kissie, scenting the prey afar off, like a wicked little vulture, and sharpening up her talents, if not her talons, to go to work upon it at once.

"It positively is," cried the hostess, thoroughly dismayed. "A mistake or a trick of that horrid Bet's! She has said seven to all, just to vex me, and I sha'n't be able to have one word with you. Oh, *please*, Mr. Crawshay, help me a little bit, for I shall never be able to do anything with two stupid men for an entire hour. That girl did it to annoy me."

Annoy or otherwise, she had certainly done it, for here were the two men—not exactly together, but almost—within half a minute of one another, both with enormous shirt-fronts, and shining pumps, and white ties, and such collars as set one wondering how on earth they had ever got into them, or, more marvellous still, could ever hope to get out.

Major Blowout, who entered first, and puffed so much that it seemed as though his name had been in irony given him, was a

herculean welter-weight of nineteen stone or thereabouts, with a face disfigured by a railway accident—which had spoilt his beauty, but greatly improved his purse—and a very small head, quite out of proportion to his size, and so level on the top as to remind one of a table-land, or a tea-tray, or an old-fashioned glazed punch-d'oyley; very damp and shiny it was, too, and redolent of sundry toilet requisites which sound better than they smell—a curiously *shaped* head, glossy and round, and always on the jerk, as though waking up suddenly from involuntary slumber. It could not, speaking properly, have been called a bullet, because it would not go down a gun-barrel, or, supposing it once went down, would not be likely to come up again in a hurry. No geometrical term could possibly convey any idea of that head. It was not a decahedron, nor was it a duodecahedron, and its only solitary claim to the title of an oblate spheroid arose from the fact of its being flattened at the pole!

The enviable owner of this remarkable top-stone had likewise a peculiar nose, precisely like a club; and, to add to his attractions, was both pious and gallant, and, when not on his knees in kirk or meeting-house, was usually to be found in that lowly posture at the feet of some blushing matron, or still more blushing maid, quite oblivious of the fact that what was only fun for him might be something terribly serious for the lady.

He was esteemed a great singer, both of sacred and secular music, and tootled a little on the flute as well, swelling out very much as he did so, and growing excessively rubicund and watery about the eyes—in sympathy, perhaps, with a more prominent organ.

The other new arrival, Sir Tittleum Tibbs, was in appearance an exact contrast to the distinguished individual just described. He was a small, slight man, with a well-knit and very compact figure, broad about the shoulders in proportion to his height. He held himself excessively erect, and his walk and action were martial and imposing. If he had never served in the army, he was a delusion, and ought to have been snubbed as an impostor. His eyes were not pleasant; in colour they were steel-grey, in expression peevish, contemptuous, critical, and cold.

His mouth, adorned with a little rat-tail moustache, was small, thin-lipped, and sarcastic; his nose long and vulpine; his complexion pale and dry; his hair, stiff and somewhat silvery, was evidently under the severest discipline to which brush and

comb could subject it, and, being parted in the centre, was distributed with precise impartiality on each side of a head which was carried so loftily and with such a self-sufficient air as left no doubt of the superb development of such important bumps and organs as firmness or doggedness, complacency, combativeness, and self-esteem.

This very remarkable personage—for such he was, in his own eyes at all events—was a much-sought-after bachelor of fifty-five. It was his glory that he had neither wife, child, sister, brother, nor anyone belonging to him in the shape of kith or kin. Neither had he a house, an office, or a vote. He lived in chambers, or at a club, or travelled, which was what he liked best. He was not dependent upon anybody, nor was anybody dependent upon him. In fact, it was not possible that any living being could be more unattached.

He had two great passions in life : horse-racing and cards ; and of these two he had made, and lost, and made again, more money than he cared to think over or recount. Rumour said—but what will she *not* say?—that there was another : that beauty had cost him more than baccarat, and trinkets than the turf ; but if he loved, it was never for long ; nothing captivated him like a new face—provided that it was young and pretty ; without these attributes, he paid it no more attention than if it were a pantomime mask.

Lady Kissie had been his admiration ten years before, and he admired her still as a clever and well-got-up work of art, but he was *blasé* of “assisted” loveliness, and was ever seeking for something fresh.

This was why Mrs. Blount had invited him, and why he had accepted the invitation. Clever players, these two, into one another’s hands—when the stakes were worth playing for.

As the two men entered, almost simultaneously, Lady Kissie glanced at the mirror to make sure that she was “all right,” and the hostess turned her ample back upon it, and advanced to greet her guests.

“So good of you to come early,” she murmured, smiling with extreme sweetness, although war was in her heart ; “but I fear you will have a long wait, and be dreadfully weary of me. We don’t dine till eight o’clock.”

The eyes of the two gentlemen wandered disconsolately to the timepiece, then to one another, and finally to the door. “Perhaps we are in the way,” they said, as plainly as words

could speak; but all that their tongues uttered was, "Your note mentioned seven."

"Ah! really? A mistake, no doubt, of my step-daughter's. It was she who wrote. However, if you can make yourselves happy, I am sure *I* am charmed."

Yes, of course they could, perfectly so—excessively happy. And, to show how exuberant they were, Sir Tittleum sat down on the edge of a hard chair and began twirling his thumbs, while the susceptible major leaned against the folding-door and leered at Lady Kissie, who slew him at once with the fowling-pieces, and was in consequence glared at by her boyish adorer, who at once took up guard at the back of her couch.

The entrance, ten minutes later, of the daughter of the household occasioned a pleasant diversion. Bet was resplendent. She had a copper-coloured gown on, and a crimson ribbon bound about her luxuriant red hair. A string of coral beads hung innocently around her neck, and she had blue rosettes on the toes of her shoes.

"My daughter, gentlemen," said the hostess, whose righteous soul was vexed from day to day by the eccentricities of the young person in question, but who bore the affliction with becoming gentleness and meekness. "I believe you have met before, but without an introduction. Bettina, my dear——"

"Who's that?" exclaimed the many-hued figure. "Not me—that's one thing. I ain't so grand."

"My dear love, how you take one up!" murmured the stately Mrs. Blount, with a perfectly martyr-like face. "I was about to say that I have wanted you very much indeed. Where have you been?"

"Down smoothing!" responded Bet, bringing out the words as if from a pop-gun. "My tail wanted pressing out; it was crumpled up so, and we've got no servants here. How do you do, Sir Tibbs? How's the gout? And how are you, major? Is the cold in your head better? How do, miladi? That's a grand fine rose you've got—if it's real. And how are you, Mr. Crawfish? I hope you don't mean to take root behind the entrenchment, because there's others, you know, will want a share of the sweetness going. That's all of ye, I b'lieve; one, two, three, four—yes. All right."

And, having thus delivered herself, Miss Blount dived into the depths of a box-ottoman for her knitting, and, having brought it to light, sat down on Lady Kissie's bouquet, and began

counting her stitches, as though nobody but herself was in the room.

"The colonel and Miss Bright are rather late," observed the hostess, who was in a dreadful fright lest Bet should do or say anything still more awful, and was in consequence desirous of opening up a conversation in which everybody might take part. "The train has been delayed, or the cab has broken down, or something or another unusual *must* have occurred."

"Then you really expect Colonel Blount home this evening?" said the gallant Blowout, quitting the folding-door, and seating himself beside the daughter of the house, to whom, by way of opening a conversation, he addressed his remark.

"I call pa a major," replied Bet, coolly; "and that's what he was in the last 'Army List.' I don't understand show titles, or brevet, or any such bosh. He has only a major's pay, and you know what that is. Where's the use of empty names? I can't see none, and it's about the only thing that Lady Kissie and I are agreed about. Yes, he's expected to-night, and I've laid out a dose of salts for him, and three pills."

"God bless my soul! he'll be very ill, won't he?" exclaimed the major, aghast.

"Yes, before he takes them, not after!" returned Bet, sagely, going on with her knitting without raising her eyes, and remaining seated with extraordinary calmness upon the tasteful collection of flowers which had cost the young ensign a sovereign or two, besides cab fare, and an uncomfortable damp drive to his lady-love's favourite florist's.

He was not without seeing, also, the sad and ignominious fate of his little-valued gift, but the recipient of it neither perceived nor cared one bit about it, only occupied herself with chatting in low and confidential accents with Mrs. Blount, while the two disengaged gentlemen, feeling somewhat as though they were *de trop*, sidled gradually up to one another, and fell to talking about the weather, and the Derby, and sundry other commonplace things.

"I suppose *you* are fond of horses, Miss Blount?" said the garrulous major, finding a topic from overhearing a word or two of the adjacent discourse.

"Well, pretty fair," replied Bet. "I'd like 'em better if they had all their teeth drawn, and their hind feet sewn up in sacks."

"Think them wicked, eh?"

"Just *rather*. I had one in India that was what you might call a one-er! Whenever he got me off he danced on me! I had a pōny after *him*."

"Oh, indeed! That was nice!"

"It was," acquiesced Bet. "It's name was Ramjoggle, and it joggled me off so very often that pa took it away one day, or I might have broke my neck. Hallo, a knock! That's pa, I'm certain. I'm going down to see?" And she darted away; but none of the others made the least move.

"Oh, dear me! what a very horrid noise!" exclaimed Mrs. Blount, as the unmistakable racket of carrying and laying down luggage, together with the heavy tread of footsteps, was heard coming up from the hall; "I always wish that people could manage to arrive and go away without a fuss. It makes me quite ill. I have got a nervous turn already."

And while one of the male guests suggested a smelling-bottle, and another a brandy-and-soda, and Lady Kissie mischievously proposed to unhook her dress—because she knew quite well (or at all events keenly suspected) that if once unhooked the wearer would never re-fasten it in time for dinner—while all this bustle was going forward, the door of the room in which they were assembled was flung back upon its hinges, and Bet entered, with a black-robed figure upon her arm.

"Pa's gone to change," she exclaimed. "Clothes all dirty, horse fell, pa flung out, luggage upset; but here's Miss Bright, and welcome to her, though she didn't want to come in here."

CHAPTER XII.

IN an instant all had risen, and were scanning, with various degrees of curiosity, the new-comer—who, very pale, but perfectly self-possessed, returned Mrs. Blount's stately caress with evident warmth, and was then presented in turn to each of the guests. It was a triumph for the hostess to perceive that the martial little baronet laid aside the air of carelessness with which he usually went through an introduction ; and that he looked with keen interest at the sweet face, which smiled a little, and then quivered almost to tears. As for Major Blowout, he bent his flattened head very low indeed, and nearly stepped back on young Crawshay, who was bowing and blushing at his elbow, in a state of deep anxiety lest his little lady-love should esteem him smitten.

Lady Kissie herself was tremendously on the alert. The fowling-pieces had been busy from the moment of the girl's entrance, taking in every detail of her extremely unpretentious *toilette*, and they finally fixed themselves upon the calm, wistful countenance, which never seemed half so beautiful at first as when well-studied.

"She'll do," murmured the beauty to herself ; "a decided acquisition." Then she put out both hands, and said, sweetly, "You must be very tired, dear. Such a long journey : travelling all day. Mrs. Blount has asked me to take you to your room."

"Thank you," said Honor, simply, "I shall be extremely glad to go ; but pray allow me to go alone. I am not accustomed to any attentions, and should be sorry to take you from your friends."

Despite the protest, however, Lady Kissie went—accommodating her usually jaunty footstep to the grave, sober one of the youthful guest, and accompanying her upstairs with a face as sympathetic as that of a mute.

That the two got on well together, during the half-hour that elapsed before their re-appearance, might be gathered from the

fact that, when they returned, the hand of the sombre figure was through the arm of the lively one, and that numerous little toilette touches—palpably Lady Kissie's—were visible about the person of the recently-arrived guest.

"You have done wonders," whispered the gratified voice of Mrs. Blount, as her husband, attired in a crimson silk smoking-suit, got up from the depths of an arm-chair to shake hands with the winsome beauty, "she positively looks quite nice. I'm awfully obliged to you."

"Not at all," returned her ladyship, in the same subdued tone; "she's not bad; and you see Sir T. is already devoted. You have, of course, told him that he is to escort her to dinner?"

The meal was to Honor an inexpressibly weary one. The ceremony chilled and oppressed her. Accustomed to the early hours and homely ways to which her late guardian had from childhood educated her simple tastes, the long-protracted misery of a modern dinner-party filled her with a bitter inward protest against all such things. Her cavalier, Sir Tittleum Tibbs, evidently understood what she did not—the art of dining. He helped himself with judicious lavishness to every dish of especial daintiness, letting the less *récherché plats* go by, and drank but one wine during the long succession of courses. He was an admirable talker, and, in total unconsciousness of the fact that four interested eyes were watching every look and gesture, Honor listened at first, and talked a little also, until, feeling very tired, her attention gradually wandered from the discourse, and she sat entirely silent, or answered as if in a dream. Once, and once only, did she seem to rouse herself during the latter portion of the meal: it was when her attentive cavalier leaned demonstratively towards her, and whispered his first compliment in her ear. Then her sudden flush told that some chord—jarring or otherwise—had been touched, and the blush deepened to crimson, as she perceived that the hostess and Lady Kissie exchanged glances, and were evidently quietly watching the effect of the baronet's undisguised admiration.

"Jessel came over with us, by the way," observed Colonel Blount, when the dessert was in progress and the servants had left the room.

"Oh, dear! you never told me a word about it!" ejaculated his wife, her usual calm placidity apparently a good deal disturbed; "you might have telegraphed that he was coming. I fear we have not a disengaged room to-night."

"Well, never mind about that. He is not coming to stop here; would not even come to dinner, but said he might look in by-and-by."

"A most charming man," murmured the hostess, calm again; but whether his going to a hotel in place of trespassing upon her hospitality had anything to do with his charms, remained, of course, unexplained.

"Who is Captain Jessel?" inquired Lady Kissie, who was always tremendously wide-awake whenever men were mentioned, and who had the military so much on the brain that she called every male individual "Captain," "Major," or "Colonel," unless specially apprised that the personage in question was not actually a member of the British Army.

"Mr. Jessel is my new agent; a capital fellow," replied Colonel Blount. "Knows his work, and does it. No humbugging with him, I can tell you, among those Irish scoundrels. He's just beginning to show them who's master and who's man. High time, too; the property was going to ruin. No one over it for years past that was capable of distinguishing between a sovereign and a new farthing."

"So stupid!" smiled Mrs. Blount, at the same time directing a quick glance at her lord, and touching her lips with her fan, to convey to him that her words carried a double meaning.

Her eyes, as she concluded, happened to fall upon Major Blowout's expansive shirt-front, on which a fragment of sweetbread, a mullet-bone, and several drops of gravy and portwine were quietly resting; and the scatterer of these dainties, considering himself specially addressed, answered, fussily,

"Oh, very—very much so, indeed!" without having the faintest idea of what on earth they were all talking about.

"I think so," resumed the hostess, eating figs. "How unnaturally warm it is this evening! Cold, I mean." And she stretched her foot underneath the table, to notify to her husband by a warning touch that Miss Bright's distended eyes were fixed upon him, and that her bosom had begun to heave: an agitation for which, had it been known, there was a twofold reason.

The covert signal passed, however, unappreciated, for, instead of trampling on the colonel's boot-toe, the unwary matron only stirred up that of young Crawshay, who, thinking that it was the Beauty who was playing at love-making under cover of the mahogany, returned the attention with such compound interest that Mrs. Blount, unprepared for so pronounced a return, uttered

a little scream. She sought to stifle this with a cough, while Lady Kissie looked sweetly unconscious, and the puzzled ensign glanced confusedly from one to the other, and swallowed Sir Tittleum Tibb's claret in place of his own.

"I say, and maintain," pursued the host, not in the least perceiving that he had begun to ride his hobby over very dangerous ground; "I shall *always* maintain that it is a shame for a man to shirk his duty, and sit down under heavy loss, rather than go to what he thinks the 'trouble' of enforcing honesty and proper order. These Irish are a set of confounded rogues! There are fellows on this Galway estate of mine who are actually three and four years in arrears, and yet want to throw dust in Jessel's eyes by pretending that they haven't a sixpence, whereas they have heaps of money in the savings-bank, if they only chose to pay it. Ruffianism, I call it; nothing less."

He pushed his wine-glass from him, and ran his long, lean fingers through his grizzled beard, with a snort which meant anger and impatience both.

Honor's eyes—open now to their fullest extent—were fixed upon his face, and her parted lips moved uneasily.

"Indeed you are mistaken," she said, in a low but firm voice. "They are an honest and affectionate people, and would, as a rule, pay if they could; but how *can* they? One bad season after another has ruined their crops, and their turf, and everything on which they were dependent for the amount of their rents, and they have nothing left."

"Pish!" said the colonel, in a low, contemptuous tone.

"It is quite true," she earnestly continued. "A man died of starvation close to us in the winter, and we did not know that he was really in want until he was dead! They are living on Indian meal, and have nothing to cover them at night, except their rags of clothing. Poor, *poor* creatures!" And the tears, which her own sorrow had not yet brought to her eyes, stood in them now, while her soul-lit face, flushed with its pure earnestness, looked as though the light of Heaven were upon it.

Colonel Blount struck his hand upon the table.

"What do *you* know about such matters?" he vexedly exclaimed. "A child like you! If you have been under a fool's teaching, I'm not one, I can tell you."

"Under *what*?" asked Honor, trembling excessively, and growing white as she spoke.

"Oh, *dear* me! Let us have no more of this!" interrupted

Mrs. Blount, standing suddenly up, with a good deal of noisy bustle: a signal, of course, for all the ladies present to leave the room. "We are sick to death of the Irish question. I shall have it tabooed at all my dinners for the remainder of the season." And, motioning to Lady Kissie to lead the way, the perturbed matron, with a forced smile upon her face, carried her silks and her worries upstairs together.

Honor walked behind her, as if in a dream, but was aroused on the first landing by a pinch on the arm from Bet.

"It's his liver," she whispered, confidentially, tapping the seat of that organ with her right hand, and winking like a goblin; "he'll be all right to-morrow, so don't mind him. Three blue pills and a dose of salts!" And, making a wry face at Lady Kissie's back, she drew a grave one immediately afterwards, and followed her stepmother into the drawing-room, while Honor—murmuring something about going upstairs for a smelling-bottle—crept stealthily past the door from which a flood of rosy light was issuing, and stole away to her own chamber.

With swelling heart and burning eyeballs she flung herself upon the bed, and buried her face among the pillows. Never before had her new guardian spoken to her in so harsh a strain—never before had she seen that hard, cruel look upon his always crafty face—and, above all the rest, never hitherto had he spoken one disrespectful word of the dead, whose memory was to her so precious and beloved. It frightened her. Either he had been acting a part at Nutley—a sort of masked *rôle*, which had seemed like perfect amiability very lightly veiled—or his nature had, on coming home, undergone a change which augured but little for her future peace.

Then, as the evening wore on, fears began to assail her lest she should be sent for, and compelled to go down. This would indeed be dire punishment, and it seemed destined to come to pass, for scarcely had the unhappy thought taken possession of her mind when a low, ominous knocking resounded upon the panel of her bed-room door, and in answer to her wearily-spoken "Come in," a very smart maid bustled into the chamber, and walked right up to the bedside, holding a slip of folded paper in her hand.

"If you please, 'm, Mrs. Blount says will you be so kind as to come downstairs; and Miss Blount has sent you this."

She held out the paper, which Honor unfolded and read by the glimmer of a half-turned gas-jet close at hand. The words

traced upon it, in rugged pencilling, were few and uncere-
monious :

"If you ain't a fool, come down."

The girl clasped her brow between her hands and thought for a moment, ere she said,

"Is anybody in the drawing-room, excepting those who dined?"

"One gentleman, I think, 'm; just gone in."

"I cannot go down," she exclaimed, glancing at her rumpled hair reflected in an opposite mirror, and then at her disordered finery, which Lady Kissie had been at such pains to arrange. "I really cannot. Please, say so to Mrs. Blount."

The maid said nothing further, but quietly left the room, opening the door again, however, to say,

"Oh, if you please, 'm, I forgot. The coachman has sent word that your dog is so unrestful in the stable, he's afraid to lock up. He's barking quite dreadful, he says, 'm."

"In the *stable*," echoed Honor, in tones of surprise and distress. "Poor Sancho! has he been put out? He is so accustomed to be with me, he will never stop quiet there. Miss Blount said I was to leave him to her, and she would look after him."

"Yes, 'm; she shut him up in the housekeeper's press, with plenty of pudding and cakes; but, laws, 'm, he cried fit to kill himself, and the master came down before dinner, and ordered him out. The mistress can't bear dogs, 'm."

"Well, I don't know what to suggest!" cried Honor, in desperation, "unless you can get him quietly up here, while they are all engaged. He could sleep under my bed, and I could smuggle him downstairs in the morning before anybody was about. Poor fellow! I could not have left him behind me. He would have died!"

The maid looked rather puzzled over the suggestion just made by Sancho's mistress, and murmuring something about consulting with Miss Blount, made a hasty and uncere-
monious exit; while Honor, in sad perplexity, and dreadfully frightened lest a second summons to the drawing-room—a resistless one this time—should follow the first, hurried off her clothing with all possible haste, and, creeping into bed, lay listening with a beating heart for a further invasion of her territory.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR a long, long while—hours it seemed—there was complete silence below. Then a faint, distant sound arose, like that of a piano heard through many closed barriers, or in the next house perhaps, accompanied by, she thought, a male voice; then more silence, and finally—a little later on—an opening and shutting of doors, a murmur of voices, some laughter, a rattle of carriage wheels, followed by a confusion of noises, as of a general locking-up.

“They are going to bed, at last!” soliloquised tired Honor. “I shall not be sent for now, and so I may settle to sleep. What a long day this has been!”

Too soon yet, however, for self-gratulation, for, a moment or two later, the door was flung open, and, without knock or warning, Bet entered, leading by the collar the spaniel Sancho, who, the moment he beheld his mistress, burst from the hand that was restraining him, and jumped full tilt upon the bed, where he behaved in an extremely foolish manner, flinging himself about like a dolphin—butting his head among the laced pillows, while his legs kicked out any and everywhere together—and uttering short cries of most frantic joy.

Miss Blount stood by, candlestick in hand, and watched the performance with a queer little elfish grin.

“It’s well the Step ain’t here,” was all she volunteered to say.

“I really cannot help it. I did not want him so near me at all!” exclaimed Honor, in great perplexity, and striving with all her might to restrain the dog’s fervent anxiety to lick her face. “I wished him to stop under the bed, if he would.”

“Under a fiddlestick’s end!” ejaculated Bet, in a tone of high contempt. “Bed-clothes are softer than boards any day. Animals ain’t idiots. I’ve had him locked up in the box-ottoman in the library these two hours, and, when he howled, I thought he was lonesome, so I put the kitten in to keep him

company. I b'lieve he has ate it up. I can't find it, anyhow. Come down out o' that, you gaby, and get into this chair!" tapping a well-cushioned fauteuil—"and stop in it, too, and behave yourself, or else there's some one I know in this house that will give you two black eyes and a bruised nose the first time she comes across you! Fashionable ladies can rap wonderfully hard, I can tell you—and kick, too—so be prepared, and look out for squalls, or *you'll* be made to squall to some purpose!"

The spaniel, led by the force of her strong will, and urged by his mistress's gentle mandate, crept to the place assigned him, and, after turning round and round about a hundred times or thereabouts, finally coiled himself up, and lay winking at both girls in familiar and friendly fashion.

"Has that creature done fidgetting, do you think?" asked Bet, sententiously; "for, if he has, I suppose I can talk to you."

"You certainly can," responded Honor, in some surprise, and with an uncomfortable consciousness that something unpleasant was about to come.

"That's a good thing," said Bet, with her accustomed blunt brevity. "Do you snore?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Honor, in much astonishment, and with eyes so widely opened as to banish, for a time at any rate, all thoughts of things pertaining to sleep.

"Does Sankey?" pursued the questioner, looking suspiciously at the half-closed eyes and generally drowsy aspect of the blinking spaniel.

"How on earth should I be able to tell?" said the mystified Honor, having failed in catching the direction of her glance, and being consequently seized with a ghastly suspicion that Miss Blount was a lunatic, or something bordering thereupon.

"How did I know you couldn't?" said Bet, quietly. "I thought perhaps you had a basket for him, within earshot, at Nutley; or a cradle, wadded with down."

"Are you mad?" ejaculated Honor, now thoroughly convinced that she was conversing with a maniac. "You must be, to say such things."

"No, I'm not a bit," replied the other, coolly. "If that wasn't what you called His Eminence in the chair, 'twas something like enough to pass for it. Never mind. The reason I asked about the snoring was, I've come in to sleep with you."

"Oh, have you?" murmured Honor, evidently not at all elated by the intelligence; indeed, her face lengthened very

considerably on hearing it, and her eyes commenced scanning every corner of the room in search of another bed.

"I have," said Bet; "and mind, if you snore, I'll pound you; and, if you kick, I'll land you out on the floor."

"That's a pleasant prospect," observed Honor, whose heart, already heavy, sank terribly at the idea of such summary proceedings; "but, considering that I can't be sure of not doing either, or both, don't you think you—you—had better—leave me to myself, for the present at any rate? I have never slept with anybody in my life."

"Well, it's time you began," said Bet, letting off her words like shots from a revolver. "Don't get going to sleep now till I'm in bed, or I'll wake you up with a pin, for I've got a thing or two to say to you."

"But," remonstrated Honor, who was unspeakably exhausted, and longing for rest; "can you not say it at once, or put it off until to-morrow? I am so very weary to-night."

"Well, of course, I know you must be," said Bet, with cold sympathy; "but to-morrow won't do at all. I might sleep it out in the morning, and then if the Step came meandering in here in her night-cap, to have a private-and-confidential talk with you, all my schemings would go for nought. No—I first, Step after."

And, whipping a towel off the rail with great celerity, she pinned it about her shoulders, and proceeded to let down her back hair.

"But why can you not say whatever you have *got* to say now—at once—and then go to bed in your own room?" asked Honor, in sheer desperation, feeling that hints and fencing were of no earthly use with this girl, and that plain speaking was necessary for the prevention of an impending evil.

Bet faced round, with a forest of hairpins in her hand, and a very cross yet half-amused look upon her decidedly remarkable countenance.

"Do I look dirty?" she exclaimed.

Bad as was the humour in which Honor at that moment was, she could not truthfully utter an affirmative in reply to so plain and singular a question. She even laughed, as the very decided negative which formed her answer fell from her lips.

"Very well, then," said Miss Blount; "if you've got no reasonable objection to me, I'm going to stay, because maybe in the middle of the night I'd think of something I wanted to

say to you, and out it *should* come on the spot, and I don't like pirouetting the passages in my bare feet, and meeting ghosts and goblins. To be on the spot will be handier, for then I can wake you up with a pinch."

"Oh, dear," sighed the hapless recipient of this cheering intelligence; "I hope you will not. I never could bear being pinched."

"Nor I," said Bet, squinting at the front locks of her superabundant hair. "There's only one thing I hate more."

"And what is that?" asked Honor, less from curiosity than from a desire to divert her companion's thoughts from the subject of corporal punishment, on which they were clearly bent.

"What do I hate more than pinches?" repeated Bet; "I'll tell you: Christians."

"Oh! you are surely not serious?" exclaimed Honor, much shocked.

"Yes, I am, perfectly. Long ago they used to be nice, good, amiable people, with poke-bonnets, and bags full of things for the poor. Now the only bags they carry are gall-bags to flavour what they say; and their bonnets are poked in a different sort of style—like their noses—into everybody's business except their own. You hear a bad story, and trace it up, it's to the door of one of 'em you'll track it. Oh, don't I just know 'em. I'm looking out for a heathen myself."

"No, you are not; I don't believe you," said Honor, whose eyes had opened wider at every syllable she heard.

"Oh, yes, I am," reiterated Bet; "when I can find a Kalmuck or a Cherokee I'll pester him into marrying me, and set up a wigwam at once."

All this time she was quietly brushing out her crop of red hair with Honor's ivory-backed brushes, and tugging remorselessly at every rough tangle with her delicate tortoiseshell comb. Then she went to the washstand, and began to splash about, having first abstracted a nailbrush from the dressing-case, which (unfortunately, the owner thought) lay open upon the table.

"Good gracious," soliloquized Honor, from beneath the bed-clothing, "I wonder will she use my tooth-brush next?"

"You see," said Bet, shaking the wet from her hands all over the carpet, before drying them upon the towel, "I didn't wait to collect my fallals before coming in here. I knew yours would do. Now I'll be in bed before you'd say 'knife.' Does that old dog stop quiet all night, or does he get on his pins and

howl, by way of variety? Some of 'em do. My eye, won't there be a sweet shindy to-morrow if he does. Shall I tie my garter round his muzzle?"

"Dear me! no," exclaimed Honor, starting up in real and grave apprehension, as she saw the long, lanky, knitted affair waved in close proximity to her favourite's nose; "I am sure he will give no trouble, if you will only leave him alone."

"Oh, I'll do that, and welcome," said Bet, scudding about the room in her petticoats, which were short enough to show that she wore striped stockings, like a clown; "but remember, if he gives any music in the night, I'll scrawl his eyes out on the spot, or send him through the window on his head."

Honor felt too wretched to utter any reply to this threatened summary disposal of her pet. She lay like a martyr, quietly looking on, while her singular companion dived to the bottom of one of her nicely packed boxes to fish up an article of night-attire in place of her own.

"Did you get a note I sent you?" Bet demanded, sitting down upon the floor and leisurely peeling off her parti-coloured hose, having first removed the blue-rosetted shoes.

"I got a piece of paper—yes, a note, I suppose you would call it," responded the suffering guest; "but I could not go down. I really could not. I felt so tired and—and—offended."

"Oh, with pa, you mean? Well, you'll have to give up being offended with *him*, because it's his liver, and not himself, that's to blame. I told you that if you weren't a fool you'd come, and you'll find out what I meant before very long. Now, I'm sleepy, so good-night." And she bounced into bed, bringing a rush of cold air along with her; and bounced out again to extinguish the forgotten gas.

Utterly wearied, Honor soon fell into an exhausted slumber, and was dreaming brokenly of Nutley, and of the old churchyard, and Meadow Lane, and it must be confessed of some one whom she had lately met there, when a push and a shake awoke her, and a voice said in her ear,

"I say; wake up! I want to talk to you; and Sankey's snoring."

Needless to say the disturbed sleeper did as she was told; she woke up at once, to the unpleasant consciousness of where she was, so far away from that little Galway lane, and its associations—and asked drowsily whether the morning was yet come.

"No, it ain't," said Bet; "at least there's no daylight yet."

Come, talk. How did you and miladi get on up here last evening?"

Honor, still very sleepy, murmured something in which the word "well" was chiefly audible; and her companion continued,

"That was an arrangement of the Step's. They planned it between them; she wants you to be on good terms with the Kissie; that's as clear as day. It's more than she'd get *me* to be!"

"You do not appear to be one of Lady Kissie's admirers," observed Honor, feeling that she would be compelled to say something ere long, and that, disagreeable though it might be to have to encounter the exertion, it nevertheless must be done.

"Oh, I'm not saying anything against her at all," answered Bet, making a plunge round upon her pillow; "I never had a falling out with her in my life—not even when her pug had pups in my bonnet."

Honor laughed in spite of herself.

"Your bonnet," she said, "must have been in some wrong place."

"Oh, I forget about that," said Bet, carelessly; "but it isn't *pleasant*, when you want it in a hurry, to find it chock-full of blind dogs. But, never mind! she'll try to make you just like herself—miladi will. Wait a bit, and see."

"She will find it a difficult task," Honor answered, simply. "I think her an extremely pretty woman, and her manner to me was very kind."

"Oh, she's all that!" acquiesced Bet. "She'll be asking you on a visit by-and-by."

"To Hampstead?—that is scarcely probable. Why should she do so? I am a complete stranger to her."

"That's just the very reason," chuckled Bet, evidently much tickled by something in the conversation. "It's a way she has. She's awfully fond of asking ladies—new ones—to go and stop with her."

"She must be very hospitable," observed Honor, with sincerity.

Miss Blount did not answer at once. Apparently she had her head beneath the coverings, and was either laughing or shivering, for the spring-bed on which they were resting shook in a manner quite extraordinary, and Honor felt as though she were in a boat, or on a branch of a swaying tree.

"What on earth are you doing?" she inquired, as her com-

panion suddenly began to choke and gasp, and to cram half the pillow into her wide mouth. "You are, really—*frightening* me!"

"Never mind me," responded Bet, with another gasp. "I'm sometimes taken like that, but it's over in a minute. It's my liver, I think. Now, don't go to-sleep, for I have more to ask you. How did you like old Tickle-em-up?"

"I don't know who you mean," answered Honor, in a cold and drowsy tone.

"Why, Sir Tittleum Tibbs, of course. The Step means you to be very civil to *him*."

"I liked the other man better," murmured Honor, who was too sleepy to mind the concluding words.

"Law! did you? such a face! like three kicks in a mud wall, and about as much expression in it as a cup of cold custard! You missed a treat in his singing: he has a fine voice—like a fog-horn."

"I wish," said Honor, laughing a little grim laugh at this peculiar simile—"I *wish* you would allow me to go to sleep."

"If I do I'll be only waking you up again," responded Bet, "for I've lots more to say. How do you like the Step?"

"If you mean Mrs. Blount, I like her very much indeed," was the genuinely uttered reply.

"Yes, everybody does," muttered Bet; "at first, at all events. She's accomplished, too: sings, and twangs the harp, and all that—and she's a great story-teller, and a capital painter. I'm in earnest, on my word. And how do you like *me*?"

"I don't quite know," was the somewhat dubious rejoinder; "I suppose I shall get to understand you better in time."

"No, you won't," said Bet bluntly; "there's only one person can do that; but you can understand this much now, I suppose: I mean to be your friend here, if you'll let me. Are you listening to me?"

Honor signified that she certainly was.

"Well," pursued the girl, "I can see that you're a softy, and you're young, so I'll stick by you and tell you what to do, whenever I see you in a fix. I'm a queer sort, and have a vile liver, like pa, but I'm not bad at giving advice. The worst of it is, I can't always manage to give it, for you'll be asked, or ordered, to do lots of things that may be very good or may be very bad for you to do; and yet, with others by, I can't perhaps give you the wink; but—mark me now—are you quite sure you are awake?"

Again Honor murmured an affirmative reply.

"Well, whenever there's anything proposed, and that I'm in the room, which I'll contrive shall be pretty often, just watch me and keep your ears open. If I begin to smell mice, you're to hold out for 'No'; and if I see a blackbeetle, you're to say 'Yes' at once. Do you understand?"

"Not very clearly, I am afraid," acknowledged the pupil doubtfully; "but I think I can gather that I am to be under your guidance, and that you will direct me by signs."

"Precisely," answered Bet; "mice and beetles. You'll remember?"

"Yes, but—don't you think these signals will soon come to be understood by others?"

"Not a bit of it. It's not very often I'll have to mention the insect; and as for the mouse, it won't be at all remarkable. There's lots of 'em in every room in the house; one walked along the fender-stool a while ago, and if Sankey hadn't been a gaby he'd have caught it. Now, I'm going to sleep again; but tell me, first, who's that man who came in late, with a name like *vessel*, after you went to bed?"

Honor paused, and pondered.

"I suppose you mean Mr. Jessel," she presently said, and, as it was dark, her blush passed unnoticed.

"Yes; he's splendid. Who is he?"

"Your father's new agent. Why do you ask *me*?"

"Oh, because he's Galway; and I know he's the agent, too; but I want to hear more. Is he married?"

"No," responded Honor, in a low voice.

"Good!" said Bet—"he'll cut out the Crawfish. *She* set her cap at him at once, and they flirted all night. He isn't a beau of yours, is he?"

"No." The answer was far less firmly spoken than she would have wished it to be.

"Are you quite certain? I suspect he is."

"I assure you, no. I—I—rarely speak to him at all."

"More's the pity!" said Bet; and with another great plunge she turned over on her pillow, and was presently fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

UTTERLY worn out as she truly was, Honor could find no rest. Sleep, so often cheated, refused to visit her heavy eyelids. The novelty of her situation—the strangeness of all that she had gone through, and all she had heard—the uncertainty of her future—the nameless, undefined dread of intangible dangers to be encountered, and unpleasant things to be done—and, above all, the restlessness of her most uncommon bedfellow—combined to hold her eyes waking, and effectually to banish the needed repose.

At first the girl chafed at this. Tossing ceaselessly from side to side, she grumbled inwardly, and complained that it was *hard* not to be able to sleep. If Bet had only not been so cruel as to wake her up, she might have slumbered on through the night, and forgotten—for at least a few hours—the bitter changes in her once happy life. After a while, however, calmness took the place of discontent. To murmur had not been a portion of her bringing up. The simple, guileless spirit which had guided hers from childhood until then had taught her a different lesson. “Look beyond the cloud,” had been his teaching; “there is generally some brightness to be found there.” And so she, his loved and loving pupil, strove in that darkened hour to take the little peep *beyond*, and, striving, achieved success. After all, how much more unhappily things might have turned out! She was poor, no doubt, but the home of wealth had opened its portals to receive her. She had left her one friend in the quiet old churchyard, with the green grass waving all about his grave, and only the voices of the village children to echo and call above him; but other friends in plenty seemed to have sprung up: not like him, certainly, yet kinder and gentler than she had hoped to meet with. Property and wealth had vanished, it was true, but they had never been hers. She had only been a sharer in them, and such she might still be, if not exactly to the same extent. Somebody for whom she could not care at all unfortunately cared a good deal about her, but he did not worry her with any undue

or unwelcome attentions,—and somebody for whom (and her heart gave a great throb at the thought) she had certainly felt a preference, showed plainly that he had only a very calm and friendly one to offer in return ; yet even this might have been infinitely more difficult to bear—had she, for instance, been foolish enough to have loved him, or were it likely that he should be thrown constantly in her way. Yes, things might certainly have been a great deal worse than they actually were; even Bet, queer though she was—but here came a pause and a hesitation—*queerer* she could scarcely have been ! the line must undoubtedly be drawn somewhere, and where more fittingly than at Bet ?

“And yet,” thought Honor, “with all her odd ways and odder sayings, she might be worse a great deal, for she might be unkind : and she is certainly not that.”

Altogether, those hours of wakefulness were not thrown away. With the good and pure, such as Honor was, it is ever so. Not an hour is detached from Time’s web that does not tell for something. Each portion which God, the Master, measures out comes charged with power, and is the vehicle or instrument which, passing under the touch of moral creatures, becomes surcharged with influence, and goes forth to diffuse what it has received. Hours may be compared with blanks, on which men and women write as they will, and forthwith they are missives, delivering messages which, for good or evil, will surely hereafter tell.

Honor raised herself upon her elbow and listened. The drowsy ticking of a clock beside the bed fell upon her ears with a pleasant, somniferous effect.

“I shall sleep now,” the girl said softly to herself ; “I always did at Nutley, and my room was not half so grand as this. I wonder how many hours I have been awake ? What time is it ? I cannot distinguish what the clock says.”

Time—clock—hours. Over and over in her mind those three words tumbled and rolled—tripping over one another and changing places, first, second, and third—yet ever coming back to their old order. And, in the silence of the yet unlighted morning, a voice which she had known well and loved most dearly, seemed saying to her :

“As Time’s clock ticks, a zone of hours is belting the world, and receiving from you, and each, marks which are to yield some meaning, whether for weal or woe, in the great and solemn END.”

Out in the chill air of that coldest hour just before the dawn, the girl stretched her yearning arms, and prayed that the hovering spirit—if such were there—might come nearer; might be ever with her, as the teacher and purifier of her own.

All this time her companion shared nothing of her vigil. There was little that was *spirituelle* or imaginative about Bet. Plain sledge-hammer reality occupied with her the place which, in the minds of others, was filled by fanciful romance. Hours were to her so many spots upon the disc of time, some bright, some dark enough, but none apparently to be much accounted of, until the general wiping away should come; and, as to spirits, she did not believe that they ever guarded mortals: she believed much more explicitly in mortals guarding *them*, against incursions from vinous valets, brandy-loving butlers, and pilfering “pages of high degree.”

Sleeping a heavy and unromantic sleep, unhaunted by wraith or shadow, she lay lazily upon her broad back, with the soles of her feet resting upon the mattress, and her knees forming a sort of cone or pyramid, which she occasionally swayed from side to side: thus divesting her uncomplaining companion of every particle of covering—a cruelty of which she was, of course, entirely unconscious, yet which was none the less difficult to bear. Now and again, too, she flung out a restless arm, and rapped Honor across the nose with the knuckles of her unquiet hand; and once or twice, if not oftener, she uttered sentences in her sleep—unconnected and indistinctly heard—yet sufficiently coherent to sound like wandering portions of further suddenly remembered instructions. And so the night waned.

When daylight at length stole in through the heavy, drawn curtains, and the morning sun, glinting through the openings, smote the eyes of the unrefreshed guest, she sat up in bed, and looked closely at the sleeper by her side. Could it be the same girl who had pinched her upon the landing on the previous evening, and who, later on, had used her combs and brushes, and splashed the carpet, and re-christened her dog, and brought the combined influences of cold air and keen questionings to make her uncomfortable through the night? Was it the same face which had worked itself into all manner of queer lines, with weird winkings, ghostly grimaces, and goblin-like grins? If it were, the spirit of quiet slumber had wrought a magic change. Sleeping calmly and sweetly then, as a little child, the girl lay with her cheek partially resting upon one soft, rounded arm, and

her unbound hair, touched with the gold of the early sunbeams, straying picturesquely over the pillows. Her parted lips showed the dazzling whiteness of the teeth within them; the colour of the rose was upon her cheek; she was really a fair and pleasant sight to look upon.

"Who could have believed it?" muttered Honor to herself; "seen as I now see her, she is positively good-looking, almost pretty, in fact—yet, last night, how very plain! What a queer manner she has too! There is something mysterious about her. I believe she is at war with some crook in her lot, and has adopted these strange ways to hide the signs of the battle. I must know her better, then I shall find out. Ah, me! how different this place is from my darling home, so far, oh! so dreadfully far away! No light, no air, not a single flower. I wonder what it is like outside."

She slipped out of bed, drew aside a portion of the curtain, and peeped forth to see. The lower panes of the window were painted opaque white, therefore to look downwards was impossible. She must be very high up, she thought. Yes, there had been a good many stairs to mount to get to her room on the preceding night, and it must be situated at the back of the house, for there was very little noise, only an indistinct rumbling, like distant car-traffic, not very plainly heard. There was no observable regularity in the adjacent houses either; quite the reverse. They were of such varied heights and shapes that no two were in the least alike, nor did they even resemble one another. The inhabitants of them were evidently early folks. From the window of one a girl was hanging something out to dry, and at another two or three pale-faced children were blowing soap-bubbles into the morning air. Not a tree, not a blade of grass, not even a bird, except one vagabond sparrow perched on a gable, and looking peckish, as though he stood much in need of grub: a fat worm, or a slug, or a few bread-crumbs to make up his morning meal.

What a contrast to Nutley and its surroundings! Where now were the soft green sward, the waving beeches, the harmony of birds, which had greeted her every morning in the land which they told her lay under a curse? She had known only the blessedness of it—the brightness without the blight—the sun without the shadow. She stretched her hands to it in eager yearning, and beat them upon her breast in grief that it was so far off. Never was child more home-sick, never was exile so

filled with the sorrowful magic which that little word "country" contains.

Still, with the half-drawn curtains held back, she stood and gazed, and compared. The sky was as blue in one place as in another, no doubt, but how little of it could be seen here! Only patches scattered irregularly over the tops of houses, and above the roofs and gables of many crowded dwellings. And the air—in the country so sweet and scent-laden—how could it be pure here, with millions of beings breathing within so confined a space? What was life henceforth to her, with only the memory of home to remind her of what had been?

She dropped the curtain, shut out the daylight, and turned again to the darkened room. It was symbolic. From remembrance to reality was the step from brightness into gloom.

She wondered what o'clock it was. No chance, however, of finding out, for the drowsy clock, whose ticking had set her dreaming some hours before, was silent—had come to a stop—and her watch had done the same thing, the necessary winding having been forgotten in the hurry of the previous night's unrobing.

Accustomed at Nutley to be up with the lark, she was ready, despite her fatigue, to be so here also; but where would be the use? What was to be done? There were no fields or gardens to roam through, no dairy work to superintend, or chickens to feed, or dogs to loose from kennel, or horses to fondle, or eggs to look for, or tenants to visit, or streams to fish for breakfast—as she had often done before. Nothing of the kind. In a town house, a strange one especially, the advent of an early riser would, she intuitively felt, be looked upon with anything but favour by housemaid and page; nor could she find employment for hands or mind in regions so utterly unknown.

Listening intently, not a sound of any sort fell upon her ear. Nothing living, human or brute, seemed to be yet awake. Even Sancho had not thought of rousing up, but lay coiled in his extemporised bed, with nose, paws, tail, and hind legs all mingled together in one indistinguishable heap. There was positively nothing for it but to creep back again to bed.

Bet had moved a little in the interval between her departure and returning, and, as she softly drew up the coverings and arranged the pillows with a gentle hand, she paused abruptly and stooped to look at something which she had not seen before.

Resting on the white, uncovered bosom of the sleeper was a quaint, old-fashioned gold locket; worthless, from a monetary point of view, with the pattern upon its surface all worn away, and a piece of faded blue ribbon tying it about the fair, shapely neck. It might have contained a story in itself, that odd little trinket—perhaps it did; it looked like it—unfashionable and strange, and with something *hidden* about it—like her on whose breast it so quietly lay. Honor could have touched it had she chosen, have opened it, perhaps, without awakening the still sleeper. Others might have done so—probably would, as a jest; but not the girl whose heart was like her name, and whose simple code of maxims embraced the golden rule.

“I would not lay a finger upon it for all the world,” she murmured to herself; “but still, I wonder all the same who on earth she can have hidden away there—for there must be somebody or something; that old locket would surely never be worn for its own sake—and yet, who knows? she is so odd!”

Odd, indeed; strange beyond all comprehension; and growing odder every day, in the unhealthy moral atmosphere in which she lived and moved.

All, or most of us, know that frequently, after a night of wakefulness, sleep, heavy and profound, will with morning visit our drowsy eyelids, and hold us in chains so weighty and profound that it is with difficulty and unwillingness we shake them off. So it was with Honor. Falling at length into a profound slumber, she was aroused from its almost trance-like intensity by the barking of a dog, combined with a vigorous shaking, and numberless repetitions of her name. Starting up, only half awake, the disturbance soon became clear. Sancho, wagging his big feathery tail, and with his paws resting upon the coverlet, was giving utterance to sundry noisy greetings; and Bet, fully dressed in terra-cotta-coloured cotton, with blue bows, was laughingly striving to arouse her. It was not the Bet of the sun-touched hair—the quiet restfulness—the odd, worn little locket, with its face turned in to the warm bosom on which it lay,—no, none of these; it was the Bet of the preceding night: all queerness, and blinkings, and elf-like outlandish looks and ways.

“Get up, lazy!” she said, giving a tremendous pull to Honor’s abundant hair. “It’s ten o’clock, and the Step has been asking for you already. If you’ve slept like that all night, you must be as fresh as a daisy. It’s more than I have; you snored

dreadfully ! Oh, you didn't—didn't you ? Well then, Sankey did ; it's all the same. He and I have been out for a run, and have grown great friends."

"You are very kind," murmured Honor, rubbing her eyes with her knuckles, like a drowsy child.

"Am I ?" said Bet, squinting horribly. "Well, get up now, or I'll throw cold water over you. Will you have breakfast here or below ? Oh, below ; very well—all right. Do you live on figs, like the Step, or will you have a fat chop ?"

"Anything. I am not particular ; and my journey yesterday has made me hungry," was the reply. "I shall not be long."

"Don't," said Bet, shortly. "I suppose you'll want to wash. I think it's great waste of time myself, but folks that have nothing to do go in for it every day. There ain't much water here"—looking into the empty ewer. "I b'lieve I used it all last night. Ring, if you want anything. We haven't any servants, but a young lady with an improver and a tail will come, after you've tried your skill at the bell-handle five or six times."

"Well, suppose *you* begin," smiled Honor, good-humouredly, "while I put on my slippers."

"No, I won't," said Bet, sulkily ; "I'd make a smash, and then you'd have no bell ; for things in this house never get mended. If you broke your leg, you'd have to patch it up yourself, or let it hang loose. There's worse things, though, than a loose leg—as you'll find out, by-and-by. Don't forget all I told you last night, and don't rile the Step, as you did by not coming down when the Vessel came in ; and, above all things, don't make too much of that old dog, or there'll be grave-digging to-morrow. Make haste, now. Are you too fine to dress yourself, or shall I stay and help you ?"

Honor jumped up. She needed no assistance ; and, as her erst bed-fellow turned to leave the room, it struck her, a little remorsefully, that she had not thanked her for the evident friendliness which, in her own queer way, Bet had certainly shown. With Honor, to feel was to act. She crossed the room at once, and laid her arm about the girl's shoulders.

"I want to thank you," she said simply, "for your kindness to me since I have come. I shall try and remember your advice, and will do all that you have told me."

"Oh, you've nothing to thank *me* for, at all," said Bet, in the most ungracious tone she could command, and twisting her queer-coloured eyes right up to the ceiling, as though it were a

firmament worth studying. "I saw at once you were a softy, and I don't like to see greens too much done, even if I manage by a fluke to save the bacon. I'll look after you, if you choose to let me : for grand houses are queer shops, and fashionables ain't exactly lambs. Oh ! you want to kiss me—do you ? Well, come along."

CHAPTER XV

AN hour later, and Honor was hurriedly fastening the bodice of her black gown, when the deep, pleasant note of a powerful gong floated resonantly through the house.

"I wonder what that means," she soliloquised. "Prayers, perhaps, or breakfast. Most likely prayers, and I shall be late."

Completing her toilette with all possible haste, she slipped her hand through her favourite's collar, to prevent unwise demonstrations, and, softly opening her chamber-door, began slowly to descend the staircase.

A very pretty picture she unconsciously made. Her tall, slender figure—always so erectly carried—showing well out against the subdued, yet sunny background formed by the stained-glass windows upon the landings—her hand trailing softly along the balustrade, her small, daintily shod feet stepping demurely down the polished oaken stairs, while the dog, her companion, kept close by her side, taking step for step, and evidently shy of the novelty of all that surrounded him.

She had almost arrived at the end of the second flight, when a door on the landing just below her opened somewhat suddenly, and she heard Colonel Blount's voice within the chamber, saying,

"She may be a bit fresh : most likely will be ; but she won't throw *you*, and her mouth is as light as a feather. Idiot though he was in many ways, he kept good horses."

But it was the voice which, answering this with, "Yes, the Nutley stables were always famous," caused her to start, and to pause with beating heart, varying colour, and a wistful glance backwards, as though seeking some chance nook into which to fly for shelter from impending unpleasantness or danger. Retreat, however, if such were contemplated, was too late, for the speaker—he who had spoken in commendation of the Bright *manège*—was already on the landing, had seen her, and greeted her with a stately bow.

She might have passed him with an equally chilly salutation, for he made no advance or any further overture, only waited with cold composure for her to go by; but, taking her hand from the balustrade, she held it to him with a faint flush upon her pure, white cheek.

"I have to apologise to you, Mr. Jessel, for two things," she said, with shy simplicity; "but I hope I am already forgiven."

He bowed low as he answered,

"Whatever Miss Bright does is, of course, correct. No apologies are needed."

"I really felt sorry," Honor went on, quickening her words, and speaking low and nervously, "very sorry for neglecting to say good-bye to you at Euston. It may have been forgetfulness; if so, I have no excuse to offer; but I believe I thought you were to be a guest here—did not know that you were going to another place; and Colonel Blount was hurrying me, and my dog was restless and hard to manage. Then, when you arrived last evening, I had gone to my room, feeling tired, and had not energy left me to obey Mrs. Blount's message to come down."

All through this long speech—long, at least, for her—the girl hurried, with downcast eyes, and pale lips quivering from some unwonted fear or emotion. The heaving of her breast was plainly visible through the light material of which her bodice was composed.

"I wish," said her auditor, fixing his splendid eyes upon her face, and still holding her small, cool hand in his broad, burning one—"I wish you had something real to ask my pardon for; these are nothings. Have you quite recovered your journey?"

She withdrew her hand from him, as she answered,

"Quite."

"Colonel Blount is unwell this morning," he observed, as he walked by her side down the wide stairway. "Travelling has agreed with you, apparently, better than with him. He is a decidedly delicate man, is he not?"

"Yes."

"But you have not known him very long, I believe?"

"No."

Nothing but monosyllables. They had two more flights to traverse, and nobody within hearing or sight. She was distinctly alone with him, which was very rarely the case. Her heart beat heavily, lest he should mention the subject of the letter, which he had given her three months to consider and

reply to. More than a fortnight of the time was already gone by.

Not a word, however, did he utter concerning it, but stepped beside her, stalwart and handsome, while she shrank close to the balustrade, and kept the dog between them. When they reached the landing above the hall, he detached a fragrant gardenia from his button-hole, and held it towards her, offering it for acceptance.

"You know I am in black," she murmured, looking down at her sable garments; "I—I—am not wearing flowers just now."

"Not even white ones?" he queried, holding it still for her to take, if she would, and smiling a pleasant smile; "they were your favourite flowers at Nutley. I remembered, and secured this one as I passed a florist's on my way here."

A look of grateful pleasure shone in her eyes, and thanked him as he wished. Never yet was woman born who would not be gratified by attention such as this. The delicate kindness of such acts does not, as a rule, pass unappreciated. The sweetest incense which any of us, man or woman, can receive on the altar of vanity is proof that our own individual partialities and fancies have been remembered and ministered to. It is, in fact, the refinement of flattery—proving that there has been a studying of our natures and habits—an interest in us, a desire to find out and *recollect* what we like, and what our antipathies are. Honor's gentle heart was touched by the kindly remembrance of her tastes, and, with a wavering flush upon the exquisite fairness of her cheek, she took the flower from the hand which proffered it, and bent her face above it for a moment; perhaps to inhale its perfume, or, it might have been, to hide that she blushed.

"Will you not wear it?" he whispered, seeing that she toyed with it, and retained it in her hand.

His tone was so soft, so lover-like, that a sickly revulsion stole over her. Little skilled as she was in the world's ways, she knew and understood what "encouragement" generally signified, and that it was wrong to accord it when likely to cause misinterpretation of motive, or to occasion disappointment to one who might not be deserving of such. She shivered visibly, and an almost involuntary gesture showed that she was about to return the flower to the donor's hand, when an exclamation behind her caused her to start and come to a dead stop.

"Mercy on us!" cried a well-known voice. "If that isn't a

blackbeetle, I'm a canon of the Church!" And Bet's terra-cotta gown swept past with a rush, while the wearer of it plumped down on her knees upon the mat at the foot of the staircase, and turned up the four corners of it in a cautious and gingerly manner. "It's gone," she said, getting up with a laugh. "I needn't say good-morning to either of you, for I saw you both before. I just came out of the library as you passed the door this moment."

"We never saw you," said Jessel, perceiving that Honor stood silent and abashed.

"No; I'm not noisy; but I've a great eye for beetles—can see 'em any distance off. That's a sweet thing in posies, Miss Honor, but you're pinning it all askew. Let me do it. There, that's better. Now, I'll relieve you of Sankey for awhile until you've had a talk with the Step."

And, inserting her own hand where the girl's had been, she led the dog away—an unwilling and lagging captive.

"You won't, please, put him again in the box-ottoman, or in the kitchen press?" Honor asked, wistfully, as the bright gown vanished along the corridor at a very quick pace; "and you won't give him a kitten to play with, please?"

"No; he ate the other one right up," called back Bet; "and cats ain't digestible, except in sausages and confectioners' pies. They say sharks like 'em. I wish some one'd train a lot of sharks to climb over roofs of houses, and creep along water-pipes, and over back-yard fences. Go along, now, to breakfast."

And she whisked like a whirlwind through a spring-door, while Honor—flushed and miserable, yet endeavouring to appear at ease—walked in advance of her companion into the breakfast-parlour, with the hated gardenia pinned conspicuously in the front of her gown.

The room was the same in which Mrs. Blount and her step-daughter had planned and arranged the dinner party on the preceding day. And there now sat the hostess, in the same attitude, in the same chair, with the same roseate colours all about her—on cheek and person—with figs and coffee-cup beside her, and a heap of opened letters in her lap, precisely as though, for twenty-four hours, she had not stirred an inch.

A portion of the centre table was set with breakfast equipage for one; and Honor wondered how it was that, with such tempting preparations in view, and such an appetizing smell saluting her nostrils, her desire for food, so keen a few moments since, should

now have utterly vanished, leaving a feeling of dull surfeit and oppression in its place. She could smell nothing save the palling perfume of the flower in her bosom, while the presence of the giver banished appetite and peace together.

"You have actually come down to breakfast! So good of you. I am sure *I* could not have done so, after a whole day's tiresome travelling," was Mrs. Blount's greeting to her young guest, as she extended three white fingers, with a smile meant to be welcoming, but which was like frosty water with the chill taken off. "Slept comfortably, eh? so glad!" without pausing for an answer. "Well, sit down and eat. No use trying to tempt *you*, Mr. Jessel. You have seen the colonel, I suppose, and found him, as usual, complaining?"

"I have seen him, yes," was the cautious reply. "Colonel Blount is, unhappily, not very robust."

"No; a perfect network of nerves!" sighed the fair hostess, posing in an attitude in which an artist had once, a long while before, told her that she looked like Helen of Troy. "Always ailing. India ruined him, in fact. You will be able to remain some little time in town, I hope?"

"Only until to-morrow, or, possibly, the next day. I must return then at latest; but the change has been nice. I have enjoyed it."

"So short a time!" murmured the matron, raising her delicately pencilled eyebrows, yet not looking particularly affected by the news. "We shall, however, see you at luncheon, of course; and at dinner later on?"

"Thanks," he answered, hesitatingly, "but I can scarcely say. The truth is, I am going to ride with Lady Kissie this morning in the Park, have been asked by her to do so, and your husband has promised to mount me, which is very kind of him."

"Oh dear no, not at all. It is no compliment in the world. Some of the Nutley horses have arrived, and they are said to be good," replied the hostess, without apparently observing, what Jessel did, that a quick spasm of pain passed over the face of the girl, who, hidden behind the hissing urn, was a silent and compulsory listener to the discourse. "I am sure the best in the stables are at your disposal," Mrs. Blount went on, rearranging her laces with a pretty Hellenic air. "But, surely, you can be back in time for luncheon? You and Lady Kissie," with charming archness, "are not exactly going to *run away* together, I suppose?"

He looked perfectly grave as he answered :

"No, certainly not; but I have promised, or, more correctly speaking, her ladyship has done me the honour of inviting me to lunch with her at Vine Villa, and I have consented—most willingly, of course—to go."

"Oh! Then you will be certain to enjoy yourself," laughed the fair Helen, again affecting an arch coquetry which, in her younger days, had been found very effective; "Lady Kissie is a most enchanting companion. You must mind your heart, I can assure you, or it will be gone!"

"It is of adamant," he quietly answered.

"So have said many before you, and yet have fallen victims in the end," smiled the hostess, coquetting with her draped head; "but I have warned you. Pray persuade her to come here for dinner at eight o'clock. Say some of her friends are coming."

"I shall be sure to deliver your message," was the staid reply, as the speaker shook hands, preparatory to going away. "Miss Bright, I wish you good morning."

He bowed to Honor as though she had been an empress, and, drawing up his handsome figure, walked with dignity from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THANK goodness, he's gone!" exclaimed the matron, leaning backwards with a sigh of relief; "how I loathe everything connected with law; especially attorneys! Every word they utter is studied and guarded. 'I have been asked by her,'" mimicking his exact tones, "and 'she has done me the honour of *inviting* me,' as if he were afraid we should think she hadn't. I detest cautious men, and attorneys are always so. I believe they forget that they are not in court, and carry their vellum and red tape about with them wherever they go."

Honor was silent, too vexed and miserable to speak, and hoping that the urn was sufficiently high and expansive to conceal her unquiet face. She was getting her first insight into fashionable life and manners, learning her first lesson in insincerity and dual-faced deceit, and the learning was far from sweet.

"Perhaps she would rather that I had remained upstairs in my room," thought the girl, in puzzled doubt and wonder; "although she seemed pleased that I came down."

"Of course, you know," continued Mrs. Blount, calmly munching a fig, and looking pensively at a perfumed billet, as though it were a mirror, and she could see her own charms therein reflected—"of course one has to be civil to this kind of people. It is part of life's dingy side, and must be faced, with what bravery one can bring to bear upon it; but I always hated attorneys, and always shall. I don't believe one of them ever had an ancestor yet! And their appetites are fearful."

Still Honor uttered not a word, but sat thinking and dreaming behind her friendly shelter, and wondering wearily how she would ever contrive to get through the day. The bell which had summoned her had meant breakfast and conversation, not prayers—that was certain; for at her back, on the high oaken shelf, still covered up with literature of an irreligious nature, lay the neglected book of sacred writings, with the family prayer-book on top.

The room was a front one, and the girl's eyes, heavy from want of sleep, wandered wistfully to the window nearest to where she sat, in feverish longing to open it wide, and admit a little of the sunlight which was struggling to force its brightness into the stuffy room. A very small portion of the Venetian blind was up, and through it she looked, with thirsty eagerness to behold something which was indicative of light and air. There was little to be seen, however, for the space was too small. The refreshing greenery of the park opposite was altogether shut out, and all that she saw was a stretch of glaring white flagway, a hansom cab standing next door, the driver leaning forward in his high seat, and studying a newspaper outspread upon the top of his vehicle, evidently prepared for a long wait—and a grinding organ, with a wretched lean monkey, in Highland costume, exhibiting withered gambols for the benefit of a half-score of pigmies, bent on mimicry, or lost in childish wonder—stretching gaunt hands for ha'pence, and clashing his cymbals with a horrible bathos in the faces of his grimy auditors.

A passionate lover of animals, and earnest student of their lives and habits, the girl sat with her head upon her hand, wondering how it was that whenever the monkey ran down the organ-man's leg, it invariably gave its tail a twirl and looked six times in rapid succession on either side of it; and that whenever it ran up again, it just as certainly scratched its nose, and sat down on the top of the organ. That volatile, vagabond thing, the very apex of the brute creation, the near approach to the human form, was as much the type of idleness, and consequently—strange thought!—of herself, as the honey-making architectural bee, with its insignificant head, little boneless body, and gauzy wings (which she had so often watched flitting among the flowers at Nutley), was the type of industry and—*what!* a nod! certainly she was going to sleep, and Mrs. Blount perceived it, and gave a little Trojan scream—no doubt like what Helen gave when Paris first declared himself—in order to rouse her up.

"What on earth ails you, child, blinking there like a big baby, and eating no breakfast? Is that grill not to your fancy?"

"Thank you, it is excellent," answered Honor, starting, and choking herself with a piece of kidney; "but—I believe I am less hungry than I thought I was."

"Well, then, if you are satisfied, I shall be glad of a little talk with you," said Mrs. Blount, settling herself back in her chair, and motioning her guest to one just opposite her, and conse-

quently where the light—such as it was—should fall upon the girl's face, leaving her own pretty well in shadow. "Firstly, then, do not be offended, but I fancy you have not brought a very large wardrobe with you—such as will be required here; nor, pardon me, do your things appear to be sufficiently *fashionable*. Rybbonds, my maid, tells me that you have brought but one imperial, and we all know how little *that* will hold. Girls accustomed to live in the country have a very trifling idea of what is needed for city life. Now, that gown you have on"—putting her head on one side, and lifting a gold-edged eye-glass—"nothing could be nicer, I am sure—but don't you think it is a little *dark*? Don't open your eyes in that way, child! You can't suppose that I mean you to be always in black; we must lighten it at once. I don't approve of heavy mourning, or of wearing it long. A month ought to be quite enough. Sir Tittleum Tibbs was saying last evening what a pity it was to see you, as if you had been drenched from an inkhorn. It makes a woman of a young girl, which is a tremendous mistake."

Dumb and immovable Honor sat; her small sleek head laid wearily back against the antimacassar which garnished the top cushion of her chair, and her eyes staring at the monkey, who had snatched a mangy fur cap from an urchin's head, and was quietly enjoying the loser's discomfiture.

"I was going to say," went on Mrs. Blount, "that you must get some gowns made by Seames and Sowings, and a ball-dress or two from Madame Fitte. We can't put it off, either, or you will be missing all sorts of things. Sir Tittleum kindly offered to take you for a walk this forenoon in the park, but I positively had to refuse, not knowing whether you had a costume fit to go in. You must learn to ride, too, if you don't know how already. Lady Kissie will be a charming companion for you in the Row, even if no men should chance to turn up."

Still speechless, her head a little raised now, and drawn up with a maidenly dignity which became her well. She was contrasting her happy rides at Nutley—through the wild, beautiful country and over the breezy hills—with those in prospect for her here; a mile of raked clay, with thousands of curious eyes all about her, criticizing her seat on horseback, and commenting upon the fit of her habit.

There was silence in the room for a full minute. The cabman outside folded up his paper, and drove away his fare. The monkey clashed his cymbals afresh, and the organ began another tune.

"I wish you would speak a little," said Mrs. Blount, in a pettish tone. "I am really anxious to do my best for you, but talking to an automaton is slightly discouraging—if not altogether chilling."

"I have nothing to say," murmured Honor, looking penitent, "except that you are very kind."

"Oh, kindness is well enough," said the hostess, with a wave of her hand; "but"—speaking in a decidedly mollified tone—"practical common-sense comes before it, in *my* opinion. Can you ride at all? Oh, dear! Why do I ask? Of course you cannot, living always in the country, where to stick on is the only thing wanted, and elegance is thrown away. I did not like referring to these matters at Nutley, but it is necessary now. I must take you round to Whippem, and see what he can do for you. Have you a decent riding-habit? I suppose not."

"You would scarcely think it so, I fear," responded Honor, with a sigh, and a feeling as though every ancient landmark were being swept away. Her hair and complexion would probably be improved upon next.

Mrs. Blount took up her tablets, and began a rapid scribbling upon them with a jewelled pencil.

"Gowns—habit—riding-school," she muttered to herself, running over the category of Honor's manifest requirements. "Is there anything else, I wonder. Do you dance at all?"

"Yes, I am very fond of it—but——"

"But you don't do it well. You must be taught, then; for you have to go into society here, and dancing is a necessity. A girl can't always sit on the stairs, no matter how eligible a man may be; it looks as if she had a lame leg. Who instructed you, may I ask?"

"To sit on stairs?" questioned Honor, with opening eyes. And a quaint smothered little laugh came up from behind her chair.

"Oh, *dear* me! no, child. Taught you to dance, of course."

"Forgive me. I had a master from the village when a child, and I afterwards learnt in Dublin!"

"Bless me, I thought so!" exclaimed Mrs. Blount, curling up her white nose in most vigorous contempt; and, again applying to her tablets, she scribbled "Dancing" upon them in characters large enough to be read by Honor from where she sat, six feet away.

Most earnestly did the girl hope that her catechism was now over, and that she would be permitted to steal away to solitude, even for a while; but no, such good fortune was not yet in store.

The fashionable torturer had a victim upon the rack, and she meant to turn the rollers for a while longer, regardless of the writhings they might cause.

"You are, of course, young and a stranger," Mrs. Blount went on, "and it will be my duty to advise you—just as it will be to feed and clothe you—from the present until such time as you make an advantageous match. Well, to commence with, I have to warn you against too close a companionship with my step-daughter Bet. She is a most singular girl; very good in her own way—obedient to her father, and all that, but odd beyond description. She is vulgar, too, or pretends to be, which is worse: says 'ain't' and 'heave,' and every other imaginable abominable thing. She has even partially corrupted *me*. I positively caught myself saying one of those words yesterday; I forget which, but it shows what bad associations will do. I don't wish *you* to be much with her. I am always hoping that she may improve—perhaps even marry. Who knows? At present she is provokingly obstinate on that point, and dresses herself like a caricature when men come to the house."

Again Honor thought she heard the odd little laugh behind her chair; and this time there was no mistaking it, for words came out, too.

"Marry indeed!" said the voice of Bet, whom a movement of Miss Bright's fauteuil discovered crouched upon the floor, polishing the legs of a spider-table with a silk handkerchief that had orange spots; "not likely. You know quite well that if I can't find a heathen I'll have no one; unless you can fish me out a man with a wig."

Mrs. Blount's first start over, she turned her back in hot displeasure upon the intruder.

"Give up such nonsense," she ejaculated. "A wig, indeed! Absurd."

"No, it isn't," said Bet, quietly; "a front like yours, or a fringe, or whatever fine name you have for it, *is* absurd, if you like; but a good honest peruke, with a canvas parting, is a respectable article, and if I were you, Miss Honor, I'd have a man with a wig, or nobody."

Honor laughed, partly at the girl's odd sayings, but still more with pleasure that she had come in, and had revealed her hiding-place. It afforded a sort of stronghold for herself, and opened up a prospect of release.

"Why should I favour such a person?" she smilingly inquired.

"Oh, because," said Bet, drawing a long breath, "he couldn't then scratch his head in church."

"You are a very nasty girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Blount, who was not laughing at all, or even smiling, but was nervously fidgeting with her letters, and her tablets, and tapping her toy-pencil upon her plate of figs.

"Am I?" said Bet, looking up with a scaring squint; "well, you're very nice; so that makes up, don't it?"

"Stop talking!" commanded her stepmother, growing palpably vexed; "I believe I shall do what I am long threatening: send you away to France."

"Won't go," said Bet, sagaciously. "I know it too well. Pa and I had furnished rooms there once. Brick floor. Big bed. No carpet. Small clock. Big mirror. Pint of water. No soap. One chair. One sofa. No floor washing. Wax the word. Beeswax. Landlord tied a lump of it under his stocking and skated round the floor with it. That's the way the polishing's done. No elevators, and seven pairs of stairs. Thank you; 'twon't wash."

Honor laughed. It was irresistible; but Bet's face was grave and guileless as a child at church, her mouth screwed up, and her big green eyes peering about among the table-legs for any signs of dust.

Mrs. Blount turned suddenly round.

"Have you had any breakfast?" she abruptly inquired.

"Law, yes," answered Bet, rubbing vigorously at the table-legs, and shaking a set of chessmen which were laid out on top, until the tall king—with crown and sceptre all complete—stumbled, and came to grief over a diminutive pawn, and the queen, similarly decorated, sidled amorously into the arms of a bishop; "breakfast, indeed, *rather*."

"And can you not find some other employment than shaking that table about?" asked Mrs. Blount, irritably, while Honor strangled a smile. "Stand up, or your back will ache all day."

"Oh, no, it won't," said Bet, coolly. "It's made of cast iron."

"It would break if it were," snapped her stepmother, in sharp accents.

"No, it wouldn't," said Bet, with her quiet, inward laugh, "there's a hinge in the middle of it. Go on, and teach Honor, and don't mind *me*."

Mrs. Blount beat her foot upon the carpet, and sipped distractedly at her empty cup. Every vestige of Hellenic gracefulness was gone. She was a commonplace, angry woman, with a flush beneath her rouge, and her brow puckered into an un-

becoming frown. Honor rose up—straight, and tall, and black clad : all black, save for the gardenia, already half drooping, upon her breast.

“ May I go ? ” she asked, meekly, making a hesitating movement towards the door.

“ Yes ; I am going myself now, ’ replied her instructress, gathering up her skirts and her letters with a resentful glance at Bet. “ Get ready, child, and come out with me. We must select a dress for you at once. Sir Tittleum Tibbs gives a dance at the ‘ Albion ’ next Friday week, and *costumières* are so disappointing ! Well, what is the matter ? You are to go. You must. All the cream of society will be there ; Sir Tittleum is very exclusive.”

Honor longed for courage to remonstrate ; but, however much of it might come to her by-and-by, she was shamefully deserted by it now. Her colour rose, even to her forehead, and she glanced helplessly at Bet, in the hope that a sudden perception of the smell of mice might encourage her to make a stand. But the terra-cotta figure was still stooped over the table-legs, and Mrs. Blount—catching the direction of her guest’s wistful eyes—said, as she swept to the door,

“ You need not ask Miss Blount anything about it, my dear ; she never accompanies us anywhere.”

“ No,” said Bet, giving the table another shake, which sent all the chessmen into still stranger attitudes ; “ I don’t care for ‘ cream. ’ I like the tea and sugar. Next time the retired grocer, up above us here, gives a spree, I’ll put on all my best toggery, and go.”

Her stepmother did not hear her ; she had bounced out of the room, leaving a string of tokens behind her, in the form of sundry bills and torn envelopes, which she had doubtless meant to have deposited in the waste-paper basket. These Bet began gathering up, and tossing into the receptacle always left in readiness for such matters. As Honor gained the door, she saw the girl pause, with a fragment of paper in her hand, and gaze fixedly at it, with lips apart.

Long, long after, that look returned to the memory of her who incidentally witnessed it ; nor did she fail to remember the hurried, furtive glance which was cast towards the door—where she herself stood, seeing, yet unseen—as Bet crumpled the paper in her strong young hand, and hid it in her bosom.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE adventures of that day were ever afterwards among Honor's gloomiest recollections. First in order, after the conversation in the breakfast-room, came the turning-out of her wardrobe for inspection by Mrs. Blount; the criticising of all her simple belongings; the pain of being compelled to listen to covert allusions of an uncomplimentary nature to her beloved though most unfortunate country; the trouble, when her dog's presence in the house became known to the mistress of it, of hearing him abused and condemned to banishment; and the mortification of being obliged to accept an unwilling and most ungracious consent, wrung out by Bet's peculiar arguments, to have the animal remain with his owner under very strong protest.

"I suppose it's a calf, or a kangaroo, you'll want to bring into the house next!" exclaimed the irritated matron, almost shedding tears of annoyance. "You must contrive to keep the beast out of *my* way, at all events, or I won't answer for what may happen to him. I abhor dogs!"

And Honor promised, and faithfully strove to perform.

Then followed, later on, the drive in a close, stuffy carriage—with all the blinds drawn down in consideration for Mrs. Blount's complexion, and windows closed for fear of giving her cold—through the crowded, noisy streets; the misery of being dragged like a school-girl through shops and ware-rooms, of having things ordered for her which she herself would never have selected, and articles fitted upon her by loquacious *modistes* against which her soul revolted. Worse than all, too, was the feeling that the worldly woman by her side had the power, which she fully exercised, of commanding her to do as she desired; for was she not the actual provider, not only of these unwelcome fripperies, but of the girl's daily bread?

It was all most wretched. Sometimes Mrs. Blount, who was resplendently attired, would stop the carriage at some *coiffeur's*

or other favourite resort, and enter alone, leaving Honor for a few welcome moments to draw up the blinds and let down the windows, and vary her captivity with a glimpse of freedom.

It was one of those bright, sunshiny, gusty days of early summer, when the dust, dry and pungent as pepper, runs before the street-passenger in a long trailing thread, or blows in strange semicircles which strive to diagram themselves and form ground-plans on the dry, clean, sunlit pavement, while odds and ends of torn paper blow about like sybilline leaves, and the wind sways the golden perches—so deftly caught, but never landed—which hang flickeringly over the doors of shops where fishing-tackle is sold.

Sunshine and breezes, through spring woods—such as Honor had been accustomed to—are delicious things: so is sunshine through three feet of June grass, fit for mowing, when the thick flowers close like waves over your face, as you lie drowsily upon your back, enjoying the pleasures of doing nothing, and listening to the song and murmur of bird and insect around you. But no such sunshine is to be had in London; little is known there of the pleasures which, to the country-born and country-bred, are the very riches of life. What are they—of what account—to a population caged under miles of heavy roofing, in streets where the chimneys keep telegraphing to one another by smoke-signals, where consumptive geraniums sicken and die at closed windows for a breath of fresher air, where flowers—except at the florist's—are curiosities, and the hot, dark breath of sorrow's furnaces thickens the smiling atmosphere?

Yes, it was all very different to Nutley, and to Meadow Lane, and the wild, heathery districts—so full of untamed loveliness—of her native place. There was nothing in the very least like the country—except, perhaps, Covent Garden, where the show of garden produce made a sort of forced similitude. She actually had the hardihood to rush in there for five minutes, while her chaperone was closeted with a *parfumeuse* close by. The place was a halo of delight: a fairy *tableau*; one might have expected to see the ballet come dancing up between the banks of Barcelona nuts, oranges, winter apples, and huge boulders of melons from Valencia.

Forgetful for a brief spell of Mrs. Blount, and of Seames and Sowings, and Madame Fitte, and other minor miseries, like a bird freed for a while from bondage, the girl went peeping here and there, and exploring, and gazing at the quaint old edifice

where Charles II.'s favourite author, Butler, who wrote *Hudibras*, is resting undisturbed, in calm disregard of the jarring of the early morning carts from the market gardens—until, wandering back to where she had left the carriage standing, her eye lighted upon an old, hard-featured Irishwoman, wrapped in an ancient cloak of frieze, sitting patient and stubborn as a look-out man in the “crow’s-nest” of a whaler—her oranges, greasy with rubbing, arranged in decent pyramids before her. To speak to her was a temptation not to be resisted; and Honor did so, and was enjoying the old dame’s delight at her countrywoman’s condescension, when, lo! Mrs. Blount arrived upon the scene, and whisked her charge away, to make her wretched for ten minutes after by lecturings and exclamations, and dark hintings about what eventually became of people who were wicked enough to so far forget their proper position as to be found conversing with the lower order of the Irish!

As the girl, later on, went wearily to her room to prepare for luncheon, she mentally summed up the morning’s profits and advantages. She had been to Seames and Sowings, and to Madame Fitte, and had had her measure taken for a riding-habit, which was to be so tight that to ride in it would be torture. She had been exhibited to a smirking man, in extremely close-fitting trousers and a curled-up hat, who viewed her all over in a long shed covered with tan, which Mrs. Blount called a riding-school; and the man had made an appointment to receive her in the shed at eleven o’clock the next morning but one, and to have “a tidy mount” ready to teach her to ride. The dancing arrangement had fortunately been postponed, for lack of time, to a more convenient season; but they had managed to interview a nice, gentlemanlike person in a black frock-coat and spectacles, who had listened to her while (in compliance with her chaperone’s orders) she sang a song, and had said that her teaching had been remarkably good. They had left his house somewhat abruptly, under promise to call again, but Mrs. Blount had declared, when in the carriage, that “he evidently knew nothing at all,” and had driven post-haste to the residence of a *maestro*, who had long hair, long nails, a long name, and a smell of stale macaroni. This engaging individual had shrugged his fat shoulders when she sang to him, said that his terms were *von geenay a lessone*, was not quite certain whether he had time to teach her, but found on brief investigation that he had, and finally arranged with Mrs. Blount to give her charge a course of

singing lessons which should begin early in the following week.

Our sobered young heroine had had all these annoyances to endure, together with the still greater one of having Sir Tittleum Tibbs, upon whom they chanced (by accident, of course), crammed into the carriage, and placed on the opposite seat to stare at her, while he sat gingerly among a lot of parcels piled around him in every direction, looking like an elderly Jack-in-the-box—a good deal less well-favoured in the sunlight than he had appeared when under the subdued rays of shaded wax candles and almost extinguished gas at the dinner party the previous evening ; and he had been brought home to luncheon—of course, also—was in the house then, in fact, talking with Bet in the breakfast parlour, while she herself was hurriedly unrobing—for the last word, called after her as she went upstairs, had been to “Make haste and not be long.”

At luncheon Colonel Blount appeared, his cadaverous face paler than ever, and his selfishness more apparent. This peculiar characteristic, in him so highly developed, Honor had failed to notice much at Nutley. Her sorrow—then so fresh and poignant—had rendered her oblivious of all outward things. Moreover, he had been comparatively alone there, and had not had many opportunities for displaying how utterly he was wrapped up in self. When a man is isolated, or nearly so, his attributes are of necessity far less observable than when seen among his fellows. He has fewer opportunities for the display of them, and so they pass unnoticed. Yet, with persons not purely selfish, living much alone causes them to reflect upon others, while, as a rule, he who lives surrounded by the million never thinks of any save the one individual, himself.

Philosophers, moralists, historians, whose thoughts, labours, and lives are devoted to the consideration of mankind, or the analysis of public events, are usually fondest of seclusion, and of indulging in small selfishnesses, which are not actually vicious, although they cannot be said to be nice—while men whose mission is to idle through life, rush impetuously into its most crowded haunts, and carry with them for display the petty meannesses and self-interests which in retirement are comparatively little observed.

Of these latter was the man in whose house Honor had found a home. He was a soured cynic, a selfish pessimist, an educated yet narrow-souled bigot, who had learned, what many do, that

all knowledge brings with it disappointment: the satiety of good, the suspicion of evil everywhere, the decay of life's dreams, the premature iciness of age, the reckless, aimless indifference which follows an overwrought and feverish excitement; these things constitute the lot of men who renounce worth in the acquisition of worldliness, and who, in studying the motives by which others are guided, learn only to despise the persons and things which enchanted them before.

At Nutley Grange Colonel Blount had played a clever part, nor had any temptation arisen there to provoke him to throw off the mask. His selfishness passed unobserved because his cunning kept it in check, and because, also, his sole companion had *forgotten to observe*. In his own house, and among his household, every moment served to call it into action. His daughter's attentions, most freely and dutifully bestowed, were met with a snap; his wife's soft words, always very soft and gentle when addressed to *him*, were rewarded with chilling indifference, or an impatient irritability at which Honor wondered and grieved. He accepted attentions as though he had a right to them, and would have heaped on more coals and spread himself out before his own fire, though wife, children, and all belonging to him had been perishing in cold and nakedness around him. His heart was hard to pity and insensible to love. Why he had married, is a question which will be answered by the progress of this tale. Bad himself, he could see no good in others. The present had for him no joy, nor had the future any hope. On the past he dared not dwell. Memory was his Sycorax, and gloom the Caliban that she conceived.

To his young guest, personally, he was gentlemanlike, and even kind, so long as she showed no signs of interfering with his comforts or desires; but in her mind as she sat near him at the luncheon-table, and watched the cold, snake-like glitter of his roving eye, there dwelt and rankled the words of the preceding evening, the bitter contempt with which he had demolished her opinions, and the slighting words of insult which he had spoken of the dear and honoured dead. Strive as she would, she could not banish them. No blandishments, present or future, could possibly make her forget.

During luncheon, the conversation turned upon what had best be done with the hours intervening between that meal and dinner.

"I have writing to do," said the host; "and shall be very angry if I am disturbed."

He spoke precisely as though he were the only one present whose duties or pursuits were of any more interest or consequence than those of a house-fly.

His wife smiled sweetly.

"Nobody shall go near you," she said, in soft accents; "not one."

"I won't, anyway," said Bet, picking a chicken-bone, held deftly in her white fingers; "I'm going a-tricycling."

Honor looked surprised.

"Yes, I am," said Bet, shaking her head, and making a covert kick at Sancho, who, attracted by the signs of eating, had stolen into the room; "I mean to go right up to Vine Villa and astonish Lady Kissie and the Vessel at lunch."

As nobody offered any opposition to this proposal, although the green eyes wandered covertly round the table in search of such, Bet changed her mind, and said she would stop at home.

"Suppose we go to the Academy?" said Mrs. Blount, with sudden inspiration; "it will be variety for Honor, and Sir Tittleum will accompany us, I am sure."

Of course he would, with pleasure; and he did, with such a show of alacrity as left no doubt of the sincerity of his words.

Honor had no earthly excuse to put forward, or she would gladly have made one. Sunshine and excitement, even though not of a pleasurable sort, had banished fatigue from her eyes; she had no headache, no cold, no letters to write (to whom, indeed, should she write them?), no boxes to unpack; absolutely nothing to do. To plead disinclination would have been impolitic, at least she judged so, as Bet was already on all fours searching for a beetle, to the confusion of Sancho, who went blundering around her, striving to discover what she was about.

A few moments later and they had set off—she, and her hostess, and Sir Tittleum Tibbs, whose head was carried so uncommonly high that his tall hat beat continual double-knocks against the roof of the diminutive brougham into which they just managed to squeeze.

Mrs. Blount was radiant at the success of her scheme: and the baronet, pompous, but evidently well pleased, exerted himself with unwonted assiduity to make the short drive as cheery as possible. It was better than a play to see the manner in which the dowager looked fixedly out of the window whenever Sir Tittleum addressed a remark to Miss Bright, and how interested she was—even to putting up her eye-glass—in the

names and destinations of the various omnibuses which went lumbering past, filled with fat women and babies, upon their divers ways. It was observable, too, that when her young guest chanced to drop her pocket-handkerchief, and Sir Tittleum stooped for it and touched the rim of his tall hat against the feathers of her broad-leaved one, the preoccupied chaperon conveniently recognized a friend in a passing barouche, which, of course, obliged her to turn her back completely upon the handkerchief-hunters, and to fill up the entire window-frame of her own side of the brougham, with her bowing figure and graciously smiling face. Then she found out that her scent-bottle must be either in the pocket of the carriage or in that of her gown, and proceeded to grope diligently in both—an employment which she was still pursuing when the carriage rolled rapidly through the big gates, and drew up in the space which another had just vacated.

“I suppose there will be a crowd here. At this hour there always is,” observed Mrs. Blount, as they alighted. And there certainly was. They could see it as they went in and made their way up the little flight of red-carpeted stairs, in company with a throng of others, and met the counter-throng coming down: some happy from satisfied sight-seeing, others cross from being turned back to procure change below.

When they had passed through the first room, pushed and buffeted by the well-dressed, but ever selfish and inconsiderate crowd, Mrs. Blount espied a chance seat, which at the moment of passing was unexpectedly vacated—and pounced upon it at once.

“I shall sit for a while,” she said. “Honor, you had better take Sir Tittleum’s arm, as he is kind enough to offer it to you, and walk round and see something of the pictures.”

“And you?” murmured the girl, pausing beside her with a very shrinking face; “we can go round together by-and-by, can we not?”

“Nonsense, child! I have seen everything that is here already. Lady Kissie and I were at the private view. Do as I tell you. Sir Tittleum is a capital guide, even if you were without a catalogue.”

And so Honor was perforce obliged to put her slender black-gloved hand upon the sleeve of the little baronet’s light-coloured coat, and suffer him to lead her through the rooms, the contents of which, seen under such circumstances, failed to interest her as they would otherwise have certainly done.

The collection of works of art was the usual thing. There was the accustomed tendency among the artists to take one-another's likenesses, and the ordinary dearth of original subjects. There were several reedy pools, with crimson skies above them and solitary herons perched on lean legs—generally one leg only—on the margins thereof; collections of sheep huddled about on scraps of heathery land; fruit enough, Honor thought, to set up fifty Covent Gardens; and flowers sufficient to strew every inch of the way thither. There was the usual countless multitude of painted men and women, catalogued "Portrait of a Gentleman," and "Portrait of a Lady," always so dreadfully uninteresting except to the ladies and gentlemen who have sat for them. There was quite a group of talent in one corner, where they paused for a considerable time in contemplation: "Gretna Green" (one of the last marriages previous to the alteration of the Scottish law); "A Greek Minstrel" (a woman with a long leg showing through a diaphanous robe, a straight line from the top of her forehead to the tip of her nose, and a nondescript instrument in her hand); "A Member of the Hanging Committee" (looking quite wicked enough to be hanged himself); "Dead Game" (not such as Lady Kissie was in the habit of slaying, but real feathered fowls); "A Veritable Outsider" (not an Irish jaunting-car, but a reedy racehorse with a lame leg); "Bed-time" (an india-rubber child, with swollen cheeks, drowsy eyes and dropsical legs); "A Monk" (with a naughty eye); and "A Penitent" (with a crooked one). There was yet another wondrous picture. "Felice Ballarin reciting *Telmachus* to the people of Sardinia," and at this, Honor and her companion were standing gazing, when suddenly the consciousness—we all know it—that somebody was standing gazing at *them* forced the girl to look in the direction whence the magnetic influence proceeded—and, as she did so, a warm heart-thrill and a rush of red to her sweet white cheeks, told, to herself at all events, that the surprise which she received was a pleasurable one.

A very little way off, and yet divided—it seemed immeasurably—by a forest of æsthetic hats and bronze-beaded bonnets, was the handsome debonair face which had peered at her from amongst the brambles in Meadow Lane. There were the lips, curved now by a pleasant smile, which had told her of the scars and crosses beneath the breast of the uniform; and there the hands, occupied at present in catalogue-holding, which had held

hers for so long a time at their last meeting, and for so short at the parting that had followed it.

At her own hands she glanced with a shamed flush. One, the right, was respectably enough engaged in carrying an opera-glass which Mrs. Blount had forced upon her, although her young eyes could have seen much better without it. It was for the other, the left, that she blushed. There it lay, resting quietly within the arm of her attendant cavalier, and making no effort to release itself. Its being there at all was certainly compulsory, but how was anybody to know that? And at the precise moment at which her eyes met those so steadily regarding her, Sir Tittleum Tibbs was expatiating volubly upon Felice's fat face, and asking her opinion respecting the rival merits of Telemachus and Tasso.

Honor did not hear him. Although she still seemed to listen, it was in a dream. She no longer saw the picture before which they were standing to the exclusion of several others—she could see nothing save the haunting face that she had striven to banish ever since the evening when she had stood in the window at Nutley, and watched the birds fly homeward to their nests. Not for long could she gaze upon it now. He waited but to see that he was recognised, and then raised his hat, and moved away through the throng. It was impossible even to see whether or not he was alone.

Honor pressed her hand, glass-laden as it was, upon her beating heart.

"I wish I were not so glad," she murmured to herself, shrinking with foreboding timidity from the unaccustomed rush of joy which filled her barren soul. "I am terribly, *dreadfully* glad; and why on earth should I be? There is no reason that I am aware of."

Sir Tittleum had quitted the evidently hopeless subject of Tasso, and was harrying her on the question of Hieroglyphs—perhaps because they had wandered to another quarter of the room, where a crowd was assembled in front of a picture of a half-clad individual with a halo around his head, hard at work upon a sheet of papyrus—when a hand touched her shoulder, and a laughing voice said in her ear,

"So you have not taken my advice. I did not expect that you would."

She turned quickly round. It was Deverill who had thus addressed her; but he had moved away, and the crowd had

already surged between them, and cut him off. Over his shoulder, however, his smiling eyes were roguishly cast, and, as he moved further away amongst the throng, Honor could see that a lady was hanging upon his arm. She was a dreamy cloud of salmon-pink, and soft creamy laces, and her figure was diminutive, and her waist much compressed. Her face was not visible, but there was no mistaking the turn of the head, or the abundant bright hair which hung down from beneath the fluffy feathered hat.

It was Lady Kissie.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was not, after all, anything so very remarkable in the fact of the fair Vine being the companion of Major Deverill at the Academy, on that bright but blustery May day. Was she not the bosom friend of Mrs. Blount? and was not her escort that lady's son? What, then, more natural than that they should be acquainted—should, perhaps, be close friends? Surely nothing; and yet, a pang, a quick qualm of jealousy shot through the heart that was beating to all outward appearance so calmly beneath the demure black bodice from which the despised gardenia had been long since plucked.

“What is it to me?” she repeated again and again to herself; “absolutely nothing at all.”

And with a hot misery, which she strove to believe was anything rather than what it was, she looked hither and thither for the objects of her thoughts, while wandering through the wearisome suite of rooms with her still more wearisome companion: answering when he addressed her, smiling when he smiled, pausing to gaze when he did so, and doing all this as if in a dream. Hundreds of men and women passed them by, and stood grouped around upon every side; but of the two whose appearing had been so unexpected, and who were so quickly gone, she saw no more. One of them, she believed—the lady—had not seen her at all, but this was a difficult question to solve, for, although the beauty carried an eye-glass, and raised it to her eye too, when occasion required, she stood no more in need of it than she did of the gold-mounted crutch-stick on which she sometimes limped for sensational effect.

Then Honor began inwardly to wonder whether Mrs. Blount was aware of her son's vicinity, and of that of the lady whose escort he was, and to marvel whether they two, Deverill and the clinging Vine, would be found in company with the fair Trojan, when she herself and her pompous little companion should find their way back to the spot where they had left her seated,

between a drowsy old gentleman with a dewy nose on one side, and on the other a bewigged and bedizened dowager, whose under-jaw, protruding, and looking as though hung on a loose hinge, was continually falling lower and lower, until remembered, when it was shut up with a snap, only to fall again.

Back they came, Honor and her attendant cavalier, the small, sable-clad hand still resting upon the light-coloured coat-sleeve. Slowly and demurely they walked, attracting many gazers—she, by the beauty of her sweet, white face; he, by the hauteur of his carriage and demeanour—until they approached the spot from whence they had started. The girl's heart beat quickly, with a feeling betwixt fear and expectation, as they neared the place, and she looked eagerly, yet with dread, for any sign of the stalwart figure, always hitherto so pleasant to her gaze, and the little, airy, lace-enveloped one, which she scarcely knew whether to wonder at or admire the most, and, effecting a compromise, did both.

Neither, however, was there. Mrs. Blount sat in her coveted seat, a little too compressed to pose in any of the Hellenic attitudes so dear to her simple soul, but with, nevertheless, a cheerful, satisfied smile upon her face, and her *pince-nez* in full play. She was delighted to perceive that many wearied persons, quite a procession of such, in fact, were passing and repassing, and hovering around her, with anxious and expectant looks, while she herself sat, not altogether at ease, certainly, but still fairly so, and looked on complacently at their evident envy of her repose.

The dewy old gentleman had given place to an æsthete in sage-green, with a head which was a cross between Ophelia's, when she decorates it with poppies and ryegrass, and Desdemona's, when the Moor has finished butting her with pillows; but, on the other side, the decked-out dowager with the hanging jaw was still staring fixedly at Adam and Eve driven forth from the Garden of Eden, and shutting and opening her mouth like an ugly box. Deverill and his companion were nowhere to be seen.

An uncomfortable five minutes of question and answer followed, and then they prepared to go; Mrs. Blount leading the way with a stately grace, a little knocked out of time by the crowd, and Honor following, still on the arm of her cavalier. They reached the quadrangle, and, from amongst the lines of waiting carriages, their brougham came forth, and drew up for them to enter.

"We shall see you at dinner? No excuse," said the gracious chaperone, as she pressed the baronet's hand while he stood at the carriage-door, dwarfed by the proximity of the tall footman. "You won't fail us, I hope?"

And having heard to her satisfaction that he certainly would not, and seen him likewise lift his hat three distinct times—once to herself, she thought, and twice to Honor—the tall footman was signalled that he might resume his seat on the box, and the vehicle travelled out through the gates again, and rolled away homewards.

Two hours later, Honor was in the drawing-room in Grosvenor Place, her black gown enlivened by sundry little fineries of Mrs. Blount's choosing and her maid's fixing on; an artificial rose, vainly rebelled against, in her sleek hair, and another and larger one reposing on her unwilling bosom. Better that, however, than the gardenia; it had come from the hand of an unromantic shopman, not from that of a would-be lover.

Mrs. Blount was there also, sitting in an effective attitude, and dressed in robes of trailing red. Bet, attired as on the previous evening, with the addition of a stuffed humming-bird on her head, was dressing a negro doll at a corner table, and occasionally giving a sly tilt to the lamp by which she was working (and from which she had taken the shade), in order that its uncovered glare might fall more fully upon the fair Helen's bistered eyes, and set her winking and blinking like a much metamorphosed owl.

Colonel Blount, in a smoking-suit of Tyrian velvet with facings of amber silk, was lounging in the softest chair the room afforded, and conversing in a bored and lazy tone with a woman of sour aspect, who was dressed in silk of crab-apple hue—the identical Mrs. Cross who had, some days before, met Lady Kissie on the door-step, and demanded from her the amount of a mysterious debt. This dame, by way of contrast to the colonel's luxury, sat bolt upright upon a desperately hard chair of gilded cane-work, and by way of revenge, perhaps, tilted her heels upon the fragile rung of it, and scraped away viciously, like a rasp.

Close at hand, but not apparently noticing their discourse, was a dapper little man, with a face red and polished, like the fruit which made us all the sinners we are, a white waistcoat, and a pair of long-fingered white gloves. He was a banker, and carried the signs of his wealth about him in numerous gold chains and nuggets, and diamonds worth a king's ransom on the

bosom of his shirt. It would have been a great boon to him to have had somebody to talk to, but, finding no victim on whom to exercise his eloquence, he occupied the time by poisoning himself alternately upon his heels and toes, and looking up occasionally in deprecating wonder at a tall man who was standing close by him, with his eyes upon the ceiling, a white choker round his neck, and a long frock-coat, hanging lank and loose upon his ungainly person. This was the Rev. Samuel Sweggles, Mrs. Blount's spiritual adviser; not attached to any particular church, but highly respectable, and well calculated to impart a healthy moral tone to any festive gathering upon which the light of his lugubrious countenance might be induced to shine.

Opposite to him, on a velvet couch, and fanning herself profusely, was a colossal old lady, with a red-hot garnet tiara, a scorching scarlet scarf, and a face to correspond. She was a commodore's widow, and was quite big enough to have sunk his ship had she ever ventured on board of it. She carried a bouquet of red geraniums, pressed like a fomentation against her ample breast, and, by way of showing her nautical propensities, wore a miniature Union Jack floating from the back of her skull. When she spoke, her tones were like the rolling of foaming billows, and she kept up a perpetual rocking upon her seat, as though in remembrance of the "cradle of the deep."

Close by her was a slim, cool, serenely stupid, girlish-looking person in white muslin and coral beads, with very little bodice and a good deal of back. She had her hair cut short to the nape of her neck, and on her innocent brow three childish curls hung artlessly down. Whenever the red-hot woman addressed her, she glowed, and whenever the parson took his eyes off the ceiling and rolled them her way, she cast down her own, as though looking for daisies or buttercups, or other sweet things in her lap.

There were three or four others—varied types of fashionable men and women—in the room, chiefly occupied in contemplating their own charms in the mirrors hung about the walls; and there was likewise a little wizened old man, with a shabby suit of clothes on, and a wild unkempt head, who had no charms to contemplate, and therefore sat counting and fingering those upon his watch-chain: a few frippery trifles of no particular worth. Nobody spoke to him or noticed him; he sat quite alone, like an ugly black ghou, dug up from worm-land to frighten the living

with his earthy shade. Honor wondered who he was, or why—sitting so neglected—he had been invited to come at all.

Presently Sir Tittleum Tibbs was announced, and entered, with his hair more sedately brushed, and his head held apparently higher than ever; and immediately after him came Mr. Jessel, who, on being asked by the hostess with arch playfulness “how he had enjoyed his ride and luncheon,” answered very gravely that the first had been all that a perfect mount and pleasant company could make it, but that the second had been given up, owing to the sudden indisposition of Lady Kissie, who had been obliged to retire for the remainder of the day, but hoped—she had desired him say—to appear for dinner at about eight o’clock.

“What are we waiting for?” inquired Colonel Blount of his wife, speaking with impatient abruptness, and glancing at the mantelpiece clock, the hands of which pointed to ten minutes past the appointed dinner-hour. “Some late comer, I suppose? It is always the way here: meals spoil, waiting for laggards. I won’t have it. Ring the bell—if it *will* ring.”

He was nearer to it himself, by a good many paces, but the thought of rising never appeared to occur to him. It was ever his way to do nothing, and to command everything to be done in accordance with his whims.

Mrs. Blount moved at once to obey him. She never at any time thought of doing otherwise; and, as she passed the chair where he lay thrown back, like a Sultan or Nizam, Honor heard her murmur—

“My dear, I thought we ought to wait. We are expecting——”

“Lady Kissie!” announced the butler, throwing wide the door, and ushering in the beauty, who entered with a frou-frou of silk, being indeed a mass of that material of delicate cobalt hue, and carrying with her a perfume of natural flowers, with which she was freely decked. She looked becomingly pale, through a goodly laying on of powder, and walked with a pretty, languid air, as though fatigued or ill. She was, of course, full of dainty excuses for being late, but had been so very poorly all day, she said, lying down, in fact, in a darkened room; and she hoped Mr. Jessel had forgiven the abrupt manner in which she had been compelled to dismiss him on the conclusion of their ride, as she had really felt altogether unequal to the exertion of sitting out luncheon, and had only been able to get up just in time to dress for dinner.

All this she uttered with an air of the most perfect truthfulness; and she was listened to, and condoled with, and regarded with looks of admiring sympathy and pity by the assembled guests—all excepting Honor, who sat in petrified amazement, wondering whether her eyes had deceived her at the Academy, or her ears here, and gazing at Lady Kissie's pencilled eyebrows, and at the fowling-pieces (always, sick or otherwise, in marvellous working order), and at the small mobile mouth, which could tell such terrible stories, and the white teeth, which looked beautiful but cruel, as if ready to bite, and the curious little contraction, or spasmodic movement, not altogether unattractive, which was generally noticeable at one side of her face. It might have been a blush struggling to reach her cheek, or a half-dead atom of honesty striving for a lost place in her beautiful yet traitorous eyes. If so, success was still a long way off.

The dinner was a repetition of yesterday's. The *m'nu* might have differed, or the table arrangements been varied in some respects; the guests, some at least, were strangers; but the weariness was the same. It was, however, in two ways less unpleasant than its predecessor; the unhappy question of Irish wrongs and grievances was allowed to rest, and Sir Tittleum sat opposite, with the slim, cool woman, in place of being by her own side, pouring his unwelcome compliments in her ear. Her cavalier on this occasion was a weak-voiced *attaché*, who spoke so very low that his remarks, such as they were, were only occasionally audible, and whose knee waged continual war against the leg of the table, whose pardon, whenever he bumped against it, he gravely begged.

Mr. Jessel was Lady Kissie's escort. He looked particularly handsome in his becoming evening dress, and it was surprising to see how completely the recuperated beauty threw off all semblance of her late indisposition, and warmed up to her self-imposed task of bringing down the difficult game. If zeal and straight shooting could accomplish the end in view, it would certainly be done.

"What a grand recovery miladi has made," Bet observed to Honor, as the two girls sat together in the drawing-room after dinner, as far removed as they could from the group of fashionables, of whom the hostess, in full glory as Helen of Troy, made the admired centre. "It's a way she has. She's as hardy as a full-muscled William-goat until she wants to get rid of some one, or to slope away from some place she thinks dull; then she's suddenly ill with anything she can think of, from Asiatic

cholera to small-pox or sciatic gout. Oh, don't I just know her ! She can faint six times an hour if there's anything to be got or escaped by it, or lie down and squeal if the right man is there to pick her up and set her on her pins. You haven't seen her at a ball yet."

Honor, with dilated eyes, murmured that she had not enjoyed that privilege.

"Wait awhile, then," said Bet, again at work upon the negro, "you'll never forget it. She gets hold of two programmes the first thing, and fills *one* up in a quiet corner ; then, when fellows she doesn't care about come to ask her to dance, behold, her card is full, and she has the empty one tucked away behind her fan for her *friends*. She's as full of tricks as a conjuror, miladi is, and has as many dodges."

"I am very sorry," sighed Honor, in accents genuinely grieved ; "she is so graceful, and pretty, and sweet."

"Humph !" muttered Bet, *sotto voce*, "a sort of sweets that's kept for company, I fancy. Pretty, of course she is. Did you ever see one of the sort that was not ? You don't suppose that a crooked eye would ever call a man to the side of one of them, or a mouth like a crack in a dried lemon be able to keep him there. If they hadn't good looks they'd be quiet enough, I'll warrant you. All the ugly ones go to meeting-house, and bawl hymns in the churches. Whenever you meet a district visitor in the street, look under her bonnet and you'll run away."

Honor sat silent, stricken dumb by these new glances into the mysteries of a life hitherto totally unknown. What was there in common, for instance, between Lady Kissie and Nutley Grange ? or what of sympathy between the choristers of Meadow Lane and the unmusical chattering of Mrs. Blount's fashionable guests ?

"Why don't you speak ?" said Bet, still stitching away at the negro, whose round fat face and absurd glass eyes seemed to be laughing up at the humming-bird upon her head. "You've nothing to say ? Oh, all right ; I've lots. That woman in red (don't look suddenly, at her, or you'll catch fire) is Lady Cordelia Climax. Her husband was a navy man, and got knighted for inventing a plaster, or a gargle, or something for preventing folks from being seasick. Look at her figure-head, and you'll die on the spot ! She'll sing presently, and then everyone will look out for seats on the lobby. Nautical songs she goes in for : 'Tom Bowling,' and the 'Death of Nelson,' and such-like

ditties. "Every man will do his jooty," she says, and so he does : he cuts the minute she begins."

"Perhaps she will not sing to-night," said Honor, smiling despite her dreariness, and looking at the vocalist, whose red tiara was glittering very close to Mrs. Blount's blond cap, the two ladies in close confab.

"Oh, yes, she will," said Bet, shaking her head until the humming-bird looked quite alive with the motion, "she'll try her voice by-and-by. I wish she *would* try it, and convict it on its own evidence at once! That girl with the shoulders is Miss Moss Manley. What they called her 'Moss' for, no one knows. There's nothing either green or soft about her, *I* can tell you. Her surname's the right thing. She's a franchise female, and goes in for woman's rights, and breach of promise cases, and divided skirts. How did you like the *attaché*? Awful long legs, hasn't he, and straight, too, like Number 11 on a hall door! He's one of six, all tall, like tongs. When the whole half dozen of 'em put their legs under one table, there's such a mix-'em-up they don't know how to sort 'em. Did you notice the parson, like Hamlet's ghost drawn out long?"

Honor signified that she had observed him.

"He is a queer one," said Bet, with her quaint little inward laugh—"looks as if he'd been through one famine and had got about two-thirds through another. He's one of the Step's hobbies. The scapegoat, I call him; you'll find out why by-and-by. He won't come up here with the rest of the men, we're much too wicked; he'll go into the smoking-room and prey. Not on his knees, but on ginger-nuts, and cherry-brandy, and noyeau, and good cigars. What do you think of old Dame Cross—her appearance, I mean?"

"I—I have not been observing her," replied Honor, looking down, and not wishing to say anything unkind. "She has, I think, a very striking face."

"Yes, very; a perfect insurance company," said Bet, gravely. "It insured her against ever getting married to anyone except a blind man. She laid traps for old Cross, the distiller, who lost his sight through the bursting of something or another—and she tied a bib on him every day at meals, and led him about by a string, and blew his nose for him. Then she buried him. He left her a lot of money, but she squandered it away, and now she lives by ear—ahem! by her wits, like some others of our fashionable acquaintances."

Honor could only murmur, "Poor thing!" without knowing exactly why she did so; but it seemed to her very hard, after leading one's husband by a string, to have to earn a livelihood by such precarious things as wits.

"Who is the little old gentleman who sat so quietly, and spoke to nobody?" she inquired; and Bet began to laugh.

"That's the Step's uncle," she replied, "her mother's brother. Ain't he a beauty? He's here because he has money. If he hadn't, the door would be shut. The Kissie won a big haul from him a month ago, and he has come three or four times since to win it back. Not likely, though. When fishes are netted, they don't get out. And, talking of that, the Crawfish isn't here to-night! *She* didn't bring him. She has other game in view, now, and she'll cast him off like one of her old gowns. Cruel, isn't it?"

"It would be, very, if it were true," responded Honor, ingenuously; "but I hope it is not. Mrs. Blount may not have invited him."

"Oh, yes, she did," said Bet; "I heard her, when they were going away last night—and he said he would see miladi in the morning, and arrange to escort her here for dinner. The Step had him told-off for that Turkish-looking woman in the striped gown. Didn't you see the vacant place?"

All the time that she was according this varied information, Bet never raised her eyes, but continued cutting up strips of coloured calico for dressing the negro doll.

"For what are you doing that?" asked Honor, after watching the girl's busy fingers for several moments in silence, during which the monotonous hum of conversation went on uninterruptedly at the further end of the room. "Is it for a bazaar?"

"Bazaar!" echoed Bet, in high contempt, yet flushing a little through the abundant freckles that overspread her fair face—"catch *me* at such ninny nonsense! No, not likely. It's to frighten the first youngster I come across."

And, snatching up the sable image by one jointless leg, she proceeded to fit, and stitch, and snip with her scissors, grinning goblin-like all the while, and allowing her coffee to grow cold beside her.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER half-hour had dragged its way onwards. The Commodore's widow had sung "Tom Bowling" with all accustomed honours, and, yielding to pressure, had followed up her triumph by a rendering of "Nelson" which occasioned Bet to go into hidden hysterics and to give Honor a variety of pinches which, however amusing and facetious they might have been, were certainly calculated to inflict pain. Mrs. Blount had sung, too—remarkably well, Honor thought—and had played a rondo on the harp with much sweetness; and Miss Manley had secured several signatures to a document which she drew forth from a long pocket, and on which she descanted volubly in favour of female franchise. Lady Kissie had yawned a dozen times or so behind her flowered fan, and had turned a listening ear to the doorway very often, while gazing thither with impatient anxiety, waiting for the coming up of the gentlemen—when, presently, there came the welcome sound of a footfall upon the stairs—a hurried, uneven step crossed the landing, and Honor (who sat facing a mirror, though her back was to the door) saw that the latter was partially opened, and that a man in evening dress, but evidently a good deal flushed and excited, entered the room unannounced.

A large ornamental screen, protruding inwards from the doorway, served to shade the ladies who were grouped about the upper or fireplace end of the apartment; only she herself, and Bet, as they sat in their corner opposite the entrance, were visible at first to the new-comer.

Both looked up as he entered, and Honor, seeing him hesitate, half rose from her seat, but almost immediately sat down again, for he made but little pause for greeting—only bowed in a strange, semi-unconscious manner, and stepped hurriedly in front of the screen, where he stood scanning the company, shading his eyes with his hand as he did so, as though the light, subdued as it was, were too much for his half-dazed vision to encounter. It

was young Crawshay—palpably, boyishly, foolishly, disgracefully it might be, but most unmistakably the worse for wine! Very angry he was, too, if his face might be trusted as an index to his thoughts, and the hand with which he shaded his bloodshot eyes was painfully unsteady.

Honor looked, half in fear, to see what was about to happen; and even Bet roused herself, and paused, scissors in hand, to gaze at the unwonted tableau.

“Is—is—Lady Kissie here? I can’t see very well,” stammered the boy, whose bleared eyeballs were striving to penetrate the mass of radiant colouring of which the beauty formed a part. “She is, I know. The servant said she was.”

Mrs. Blount was the first to recover the start which all experienced by the appearance of so strange an apparition. She rose immediately—creaking dreadfully from the tightness of her bodice—and held out her hand: her worldly training standing her for once in good stead.

“Mr. Crawshay! this *is* a surprise. We expected you for dinner, and had quite given you up. Very happy to see you, I am sure. Lady Kissie is here, of course; but she is not well this evening—has been ill all day—and is not quite herself yet. Suppose you join the gentlemen in the dining-room. You will find some friends with the Colonel, and——”

“I don’t want to see them,” exclaimed the youth, with shaking lips, and evidently scarcely conscious of what he was saying; “I want to speak with Lady Kissie. She can see me in the next room”—looking wildly about him—“or outside—anywhere! I don’t care where, but I *must* speak with her. Let me pass,” he added, as the hostess, with an adroitness born of similar emergencies, endeavoured cleverly to block his way. “She is not ill at all. She knows what I am here for, and what I want to say.”

All the ladies, the fair Vine excepted, had by this time risen to their feet, and were regarding the scene with evident surprise and alarm. On the faces of the strangers, blank amazement was written; on Mrs. Blount’s, extreme embarrassment and annoyance; on Bet’s, pleased curiosity and expectation; on Honor’s, excitement and pain; on Lady Kissie’s, a smile only.

“You foolish child! how absurd!” she said, addressing him, with positively not the faintest tremble in her voice, though her face had grown white through its artificial coating, and the spasmodic contraction was more than ever visible. “How very

silly you are! (Go back to where you have dined, and come and see me to-morrow, if you are good.)"

And telegraphing a hurried sign to her coadjutrix Mrs. Blount, her ladyship unfurled her enormous fan, and turning to the satin-striped lady, who was next to her, and had resumed her seat, she addressed her upon some commonplace topic, as though it were her aim to turn the thoughts of the company into a new and different channel.

"To-morrow?" echoed the excited ensign, speaking very tremulously and fast—"yes, to-morrow—to be told that you are too ill to see me, and then to find out——"

But here a violent fit of coughing attacked Mrs. Blount in quite a sudden manner, and almost drowned the utterance of the visitor, who was indistinctly heard to mutter some awful threats against somebody or something, while his ravings included mention of the name "Deverill," and some reference to the Continental Hotel. It was altogether a scene to be remembered; while, as if to add to the confusion, the servants entered at the moment to collect the coffee-cups, and the voices of the gentlemen, who had lagged long over their wine, were heard in colloquy upon the stairs.

The combined influences of these things served in a measure to sober the misguided youth. He turned his eyes helplessly about, like an animal at bay, and retreating unsteadily towards the doorway, met Colonel Blount and his guests face to face upon the threshold, and staggered confusedly back again.

Evidently such scenes were not by any means new to the host, or perhaps his wife's face gave him a clue to the actual position of affairs. However that might be, he shook the young man carelessly by the hand, as though nothing were at all amiss, and stopping his unintelligible words with an assurance that he would find cigars and wine in the smoking room, and a friend to converse with there also, suffered him to beat a hurried retreat, which was without doubt the kindest as well as the wisest course that he could possibly have adopted.

In an instant of time, equanimity was entirely restored, and the fans of the ladies resumed their wonted play. The hostess stopped coughing, and told her lord, in the hearing of his guests, that Mr. Crawshaw had dropped in for a few moments to explain, she supposed, why he had not appeared at dinner, but had evidently become suddenly unwell, and had just been preparing to leave, when he, the colonel, had come up stairs. Lady

Kissie talked more volubly than ever to the lady in the rainbow dress; Sir Tittleum Tibbs looked hastily around for Honor, and, seeing her vicinity to Miss Blount, looked as hastily another way; the dapper man turned his back upon the company, and stared at the hostess's portrait upon the wall, a youthful and flattering one, executed by a sycophant artist, and exhibited the previous year at the Academy, among the numerous pictures which had there figured, catalogued "Portrait of a Lady." Evidently it puzzled while it charmed him, for he stirred up the wrath of the original of the picture by asking cheerily "who that bewitching young lady might chance to be?" The shabby man, whose identity Honor had previously inquired about, found out a quiet corner, wherein he sat, and proceeded to shake snuff all over his rusty clothes. Two other guests, a decayed lord and a decaying commoner, whom nobody in either instance suspected of being what they were, strolled to a table of knick-nacks, with which they pretended to be amused; and Mr. Jessel, always gentlemanlike and calm, took up his station on the spot to which the fowling-pieces at once summoned him, namely, in front of the beauty's chair, where he presently brought another for himself, and sat down to converse.

Honor's eyes were widely opened, her lips apart, her fingers nervously trembling and interlaced.

"What does it mean?" she asked, in a low tone of Bet, whose face was one spasm of smothered merriment and delight.

"Oh, nothing much," responded the doll-dresser, resuming her artless employment, and evidently inwardly convulsed; "nothing, except that the Step spoils a scene. Never mind, my dear, these things are common enough in this house. You'll get used to them by-and-by." And she whistled a bar of *Patience*, while she stitched a red cap on the doll's curly head.

"But," murmured Honor, still very white and nervous; "he was, I think—I mean that—he was either mad, or—or——"

"Topsy!" filled in Bet, breaking her needle, and searching in her box for another. "Right you are, my dear, but, *in vino veritas*; it's all up between him and miladi. She generally drops them when they're plucked. Oh, you don't know what I mean? Well, you're young, and must learn by degrees. All in good time. Hallo! we're going to have some more music—by way of a diversion, I suppose. I'm glad it's a man this time. Mr. Jessel, I declare! that's refreshing. I had no idea he was a singer."

But Honor had. Often and often, in bygone days at Nutley, she had been called upon to play his accompaniments, and had always experienced pleasure in doing so, for he sang well, and his presence at that time had not been, as now, a source of embarrassment and constraint. Upon the present occasion, however, he did not ask her to favour him. Mrs. Blount, from whom the request for a song had emanated, moved with him to the piano; and in a mellow baritone voice, perfectly tuned and modulated, he sang the following words:—

FAR AWAY FROM THEE.*

“Dost thy thought upon me rest—
 Thou, who hast each thought of mine?
 Dost the love that fills my breast
 Wake an answering chord in thine?
 Have my glances wearied thee?
 Have my words unwelcome been?
 Have I blindly failed to see
 Things which others long have seen?
 Oh, my love! if this be so,
 Where, say, where can solace be!
 What can I attempt or do—
 Far away from thee?”

“Dost thou ever think of me
 In the calm and witching hour
 When the evening shadows flee,
 And the dew-drop seals the flow’r?
 Can it be that this poor heart
 Gave its wealth of love and trust,
 But to see its hopes depart—
 Turned to ashes, and to dust?
 Oh, my love! if this be so,
 Let my name forgotten be—
 Let me *die!*—for life were woe,
 Far away from thee.”

It would be impossible to imagine anything more touching than the pathos which the singer infused into the melody of this song, or more soul-stirring than the passion with which the concluding words were uttered. That they were meant for some one among the company there could be no possible doubt; but for whom? He never raised his eyes, excepting quite at the end, when the concluding chord of the symphony was played, and they were then turned only upon Mrs. Blount, whom he thanked for accompanying him.

* This song is copyright.

That Lady Kissie appropriated the sentiment of the song was palpably manifest. She sighed, languished, dropped her eyes modestly to her lap, and played nervously with the corner of her laced pocket-handkerchief. The blush, too, which had so long been striving to reach her cheek made decided advances, and gained so much ground that it was several strides nearer success than it had ever been before. Her ladyship's boast to her confidential friends was that she had never yet seen the man whom she could not bring to her feet. Evidently this one was coming fast enough, she thought. When he arrived, she could kick him over, or raise him to a higher perch, according to what proved to be his worth.

While she was thinking these things, Bet was promulgating a different doctrine.

"That man is in love with *you*," she said bluntly to Honor, throwing a keen glance at the calm, cool face of the girl, who, whatever her own thoughts or ideas might be, suffered them not by word or look to appear.

"You have no reason to say so," was the quiet rejoinder; and Bet's eyes fell again to her work.

"Yes, I have," she said, with odd determination; "and not the less because he doesn't follow you about, and proclaim it. None but donkeys do that. I often think how, long ago, it was thought a miracle for an ass to speak; the miracle in these days is when you can get one to hold his tongue! Now, I hear you smiling, though I'm not looking. What's it at?"

"A smile just then was irresistible," Honor answered, candidly; but, immediately growing grave, she added, "I am sure, however, that when I tell you how much more comfortable I shall feel if you will never again mention Mr. Jessel's name in connection with mine, you will in future avoid doing so."

Bet glanced upwards at the sweet earnest face, and into the solemn, wistful eyes always so truthful, honest, and pure.

"I'll never again pretend to know that he's alive," she answered, ingenuously; "but I can't help saying what I did before, that if he's *really* not a beau of yours, more's the pity! Now they're going to play, and I must get out the cigarettes."

As she jumped up from her seat and sprang hastily away, Honor perceived that Colonel Blount had thrown open the door of communication between the two rooms, and that from the back one a flood of crimson light was pouring in. The entire company, too, had risen, and seemed to be on the move, not for

departure, because there was not any shaking of hands, but with the evident intention of migrating to the apartment from which Bet had emerged on the eventful day whereon she had offended Lady Kissie's susceptibilities in so many different ways.

It was brightly but not obtrusively lighted by crimson-shaded lamps; four square tables occupied the centre portion of the room, around each of which four chairs were in order placed. On every table rested a green cloth, two packs of cards, and a box of ivory counters. A buffet was spread with wines of various sorts, and from an inlaid cabinet Bet produced boxes of choice cigars and cigarettes.

Honor looked shyly on while the guests chattered, and arranged, and changed places, and finally—after some quick talking and friendly disputings—disposed themselves amicably about the various tables, and the cutting for partners began. After the first moment or two there was very little confusion. Apparently all understood what they had come for, and settled down into their places with a wondrously small show of bustle, and with excessively business-like faces—especially among the ladies—as though a good deal besides pleasure were involved in the pursuit.

The order in which they played was this: At table No. 1, Colonel Blount and Miss Manley partners, Mrs. Cross and the attaché ditto. Table No. 2, Mr. Jessel and Lady Kissie opposed to Sir Tittleum Tibbs and the commodore's widow, whose flaming tiara, nodding and glistening in the crimson light, seemed to surround her with a lurid glare, which, taken in conjunction with her scarf and visage, reminded the beholder somewhat unpleasantly of Mephistopheles and other unholy things. Table No. 3 was occupied by the rusty man, who took unlimited snuff, the played-out lord, the Turkish-clad lady, and an apathetic-looking man-about-town, whose collar was higher than his credit a good deal, but who passed for an heir, and assumed the airs of one. He wore a large diamond upon his finger, which, had it been capable of speaking, could have related tales of strange vicissitudes, and of numerous experiences in ball-rooms, as likewise in other places with which balls (golden ones) are intimately associated. At the fourth table sat two young subalterns, who had dropped in after dinner, among the men—a beautiful dark woman in amber brocade, who had a restless, feverish eye, and the reputation of having lost and won enormous sums at Monte Carlo—and the dapper

man, who, being a millionaire, was everywhere voted a favourite.

Mrs. Blount did not play. She never did, in fact, when her lord was at home, and rarely even in his absence. She did not understand the game sufficiently well, she said, and only won—when she did so—by chance. Her preference was always for looking on, except when baccarat was played, or poker, and even then she did not invariably join. She was a splendid hand at billiards, and did not object to pool, but was careless about whist, being, as she said with a laugh, always so dreadfully uncertain what to lead when her turn came, and at what crisis of the game to play her trump cards. Upon the present occasion she followed her usual plan: hovered noiselessly, in her soft trailing robes, around the various tables, giving smiles when she received them, in her friendly, innocent manner, but never uttering a word, or seemingly the least bit observant of how things were really going, or with whom rested victory or defeat. Occasionally she busied herself for a moment or two with a piece of fancy-work, from which numerous coloured wools hung down, each of which in turn seemed to occupy her attention, as she threaded her long needles with alternate blue, green, pink, and yellow—green, yellow, pink, and blue—with her eyes fixed upon the canvas, and her thoughts apparently bent upon it also. Twice or thrice she strolled, as though aimlessly, through the door of communication, which remained slightly ajar between the two rooms, and, sitting down to the piano, played a few soft bars, which, so far from disturbing, had a pleasant, soothing effect.

Everybody smoked, even the ladies; although, to form the exception which invariably marks the rule, the rusty man put all his cigars in his pocket, and either forgot them there or enjoyed them in secret at home. Rumour—ever scandalous and unkind—accused him of collecting such things, and selling them afterwards in bulk form. Perhaps he did. If he had commenced the practice when young, and kept it well up, it might account for the fortune to which his niece, Mrs. Blount, was looking forward with, apparently, still a long while to look, although he was five years at least in excess of the “three-score and ten” which the Psalmist has allotted to man, and man has so persistently exceeded.

Lady Kissie smoked incessantly—showed herself quite an adept, in fact, at consuming cigarettes—and occasionally held

one betwixt her fore and middle fingers, quite in manly fashion, while uttering a brief sentence in connection with the game. She seemed, in short, to forget entirely her languid graces, and the "traps by which she caught men," and to settle down to the task of money-making—or losing, as her lot might be—with quite as much, or intensified, zeal as she ever displayed in the more congenial pursuit of conquest-making and winning hearts, which in the end she generally so cruelly crushed.

Bet had, at the beginning of the proceedings, fished up her knitting from the mysterious depths of the box-ottoman in which she usually kept it stowed away, and had sat down within view of Colonel Blount, on a low, luxuriously-cushioned couch, which she beckoned Honor to share with her.

During the whole progress of the evening she watched her father's every movement, and continually sprang up to hand him new supplies of cigarettes and relays of refreshments, for all of which she herself went to the buffet, bringing them dutifully to his elbow, while he made use of them in absolute silence, without acknowledging in any way, even by a glance, the presence of his untiring ministrant.

There was nothing which more forcibly struck Honor than the quietude which prevailed, the almost complete stillness, broken only by an occasional "Ha!" as though a surprise had been dealt or received, and a few observations with reference to "tricks," "points," "rubbers," "trumps," "honours," "cross-ruffs," "forcing-cards," &c., which were as Greek to the girl who had known nothing of such things throughout her whole life, and whose only knowledge of cards lay in what she had picked up when learning to play at "beggar my neighbour" with her late guardian, the departed owner of Nutley Grange.

She did not in any way understand what was going forward, and it was only by watching and observing the changes in the countenances of the players that she was able to guess when any lost or won.

"Are they playing for money?" she asked, in a whisper of Bet, as Mrs. Blount sounded a succession of soft chords upon the piano in the adjoining room, and at the same instant her husband threw out an ace upon the table, and immediately afterwards busied himself with the little pile of counters upon his left.

"Yes, rather," responded Miss Blount, knitting away assiduously, as though she had not seen anything with her visual

organs since play had commenced. "Pa has just scored. Can't you hear when honours are marked?"

"I don't understand," was the reply; "this game is quite new to me. Has Colonel Blount won?"

"Ay, just now, he and his partner; but they may lose next time, and then a lot hangs on the third game. It decides the rubber."

"And for what are they playing?" asked Honor, in a fog.

Bet took her eyes off her knitting, and threw them hastily over the room, seemingly taking in everything about her at one shrewd glance.

"For pound points, I know, at this table," she replied; "crowns or doubles, most likely, at the others, but I'm not very sure. I can only guess by the set that's playing. The pigeons, for instance, can't fly too high, I fancy. Who do I call 'pigeons'? Why, those young subs, to be sure; and why, I can see you want to know, but I mustn't tell you too much at once. The Step's fond of pigeons, and when they're in a stew she relishes 'em immensely. Now don't put on that face, or I'll have to laugh out; and then pa'll send me away."

"And are they playing high at Lady Kissie's table?" asked Honor, whose eyes were fixed upon the absorbed countenance of the delicate Vine.

"Can't tell," answered Bet, knitting deftly while she talked—"didn't chance to hear. I know miladi *likes* a sporting touch, and to do her justice she takes loss as evenly as gain. I was in the room the first time she ever played loo. She got a grand hand, after a while—ace, king, and queen—and down she lays them, triumphant, and says they needn't go on, she has the game. Well, such an uproar! She didn't know a bit, of course; but they looed her for the whole pile that was in the pool—seventy or eighty pounds, I think. She got as white as a turnip, but she laughed too. She's a real, rampant, right-down, rank, tearing gamester, but she's game herself to the backbone when the time comes to show it. I've seen her playing pound points with a tenner on the rub, and losing, too, with a smile on her face like honey and molasses mixed together. She won it all back, though, the same night. It's a way she has. Wait till you go to Vine Villa, my dear. She'll rub the verdure off you, like an April frost does off a young tree."

"I wish you would not seem to think me so very foolish for asking questions, when there are things I want to know," said

Honor, shrinking a little from Bet's goblin-like blinkings, and almost forgetting to whisper in the momentary vexation which dyed her fair face with a transient red.

Miss Blount uttered a warning "Sh!" and threw a hurried glance towards her father, who looked up with a frown.

"You mustn't talk so loud, Softy," she said, in a low tone—" 'Twon't do here; nor must you suppose that I like you any the less for being green and tender. Is there anything else you want to know now, before I take you off to bed?"

"Yes," murmured Honor, edging back again to her place, "I want to be told why they are playing for money. Do they want to win from one another—these people, I mean, who are here to-night."

Bet did not immediately reply, but she shook all over with that inward laughter which had at all times something weird and unnatural about it, and was to Honor almost terrible in its grim and strange peculiarity. Presently she looked up in her odd way at the ceiling, and, fixing her queer eyes upon the cornice, said,—

"You've lived a lot in the country, haven't you?"

Honor replied that she had, with a sinking at the heart which was caused partly by recollection, and partly by the consciousness that the question was a further reflection upon her want of knowledge.

But Bet seemed to have no such idea in view.

"You've fed fowls, I daresay," she went on, while her needles sped fast.

"Yes, often. Every day."

"Well, how was it?"

"I don't quite know what you mean."

"Nonsense. You do. Didn't they come fussing and clattering all about you, tumbling over one another, and grubbing up every blessed grain that they could get hold of?"

Honor smiled and nodded.

"Yes, your description is quite correct. They did."

"And if one or two came off worse than the others, did the rest of the gobblers seem to take it to heart?"

"No, certainly not."

"If, for instance, one got nothing at all, and sneaked off to mope on a rail, did the rest of them, or any of them, take out their pocket-handkerchiefs and cry, or whip feathers out of their tails to wipe the corners of their eyes?"

Honor again said "No;" they decidedly had not done so.

"In short," went on Bet, whose needles now fairly flew, "it was a case of 'Every fowl for himself, and the—*archbishop* take the hindmost.'"

"I think it was," replied her auditor, smiling quietly at the quaintness of the speech.

"Very well," said Bet, "we are all feathered, greedy, grubbing bipeds in this room; and the Step's the mother-hen that has charge of the brood. You don't understand?—well, better not, perhaps, till you're a bit older. You'll be wise enough by-and-by. Hush, now! Pa wants more cigarettes."

When Honor went, an hour later, to her room, a note lay upon her table. It contained only two lines:

"What can I attempt or do,
Far away from thee?"

When, *two* hours later, Lady Kissie sought hers, she also found one, almost equally brief, and in the same writing:

"I may not chance to see you alone this evening, and therefore write what I had not the courage to say to-day. Do not reserve a place for me; I really *must* go to Ireland to-morrow.

"W. J. J."

"I thought so," muttered her ladyship, as she tore the paper into minute shreds, to baffle the curiosity of the prying page. "Never mind, I will bring him down yet!"

Then she opened a shoal of letters which had come in by post and by hand, and, late though it was, sat down to answer two or three of them, ringing up the mistrusted buttons to refresh himself with a walk to the nearest pillar-box. Finally, she uncovered a napkin-shrouded tray, and ate a hearty supper, laughing at the pug's hungry entreaties, and kicking him when he whined—and went to bed in her corsets to preserve the *contour* of her figure.

CHAPTER XX.

HONOR was late the next morning, as indeed was the case with the entire household, servants evidently included,—nor did a day of unceasing rain, and another night spent in the society of inveterate card-players (amongst whom Lady Kissie again conspicuously figured), tend to raise her spirits or brighten the melancholy which hung over her like a depressing pall.

The third morning, however, was destined to effect a change, in one at least of that irregularly constituted household. Honor jumped up betimes, nor waited to be summoned downstairs by bell or gong. Eight good hours of uninterrupted and refreshing rest had served to banish exhaustion and fatigue; and the early morning sun, sending the brightest of golden shafts from his full quiver through her purposely unblinded window-panes, aroused her to the consciousness that another day had begun. The preceding two had been full of disappointment and pain; this might, however, be better. Youth, even when shaded by sorrow, is naturally buoyant and full of hope, especially when endowed with health, and the natural elasticity which an unsated mind imparts; and Honor was young, and healthy, and pure-souled: consequently hopeful.

She dressed swiftly and cheerily, talking occasionally in whispers to Sancho, for whom some thoughtful hand—she guessed whose—had provided a comfortable rug in a corner, to serve for a bed. At nine she was ready, and went downstairs, not expecting to find that anybody had risen so early as herself; for when, at midnight, she had slipped away from the card-room, there had apparently been no sign of the party breaking up.

Into the front drawing-room she first wandered. It was empty, but “swept and garnished.” Not a chair was out of place, not a cushion crooked or astray, not a speck of dust visible,—everything had been what her host's daughter would call “righted up.” Then she passed into the back room, expecting surely to

find chaos there. Nothing could have been more perfect than the order which prevailed, the four tables standing in trim and close regularity, cloths unwrinkled and neatly brushed, cards, counters, glasses, cigarettes, all removed, the genius of System over everything, and the windows (Mrs. Blount had not come down) standing deliciously open to admit the cool air.

"The servants here cannot be altogether so useless as Bet says they are," thought Honor, as she continued her journey downwards—memories of her first morning's descent, of Mr. Jessel, and the gardenia, and the phantom beetle, crowding thick upon her as she did so. No fear of meeting him thus early, however, even if he were in the house; so she went confidently forward, Sancho following, crossed the hall, and entered the breakfast-room.

To her surprise, two persons were already there. A page, heavy-eyed and evidently half-asleep, who was collecting some breakfast *débris* upon a big tray, and Bet, bright-eyed and tremendously wide-awake, bustling around with a handkerchief tied about her head, a duster in one hand, and in the other a piece of bread-and-butter, from which she was taking prodigious bites. The blinds were drawn up here also, and the windows opened wide. It looked very pleasant and cheerful, especially when the drowsy-eyed page had shuffled lazily away with his burden.

"You are quite wonderful!" said Honor, saluting the girl who, she felt, was so much her friend. "Seeing you as I do now, gives me an inkling of a secret. You are the fairy who has wrought such changes in the rooms overhead."

Bet laughed.

"Oh, that's nothing," she said, chewing away, and dusting at the same time. "We've got no servants, you know. We're four in family—counting you—upstairs, and there's six in family below; not counting the Step's maid (Gewgaws, she calls her, or some such name); *she's* too grand for the downstairs family, and not just quite grand enough, though very nearly so (she thinks), for the family above—and so she stops midway, and eats cutlets and drinks bottled beer in the Step's dressing-room, with her toes on a footstool, and a tail three yards long streaming out at the back of her gown. Well, I'm glad you've come down, with some colour in your cheeks; and Sankey too, I declare. What a good old dog it is—only for the snoring! I'll get you both your breakfasts now, in a jiffy, and my own, too, for I'm mortal hungry. This," holding up the reduced bread slice, "is

only to keep off the pecks. I've been up since six ; had to be ; Pa and the Vessel are gone."

"Gone! Where? I don't quite know what you mean," said Honor, looking surprised.

"Why, gone away in hot haste to that blessed old country of yours, and of mine too, for the matter of that; my mother was Irish, and I was born there, in sweet old Cork, where all the stump legs come from, and butter and eggs, and things. The Vessel had to go there this morning, in any case—Galway I mean—and he made some announcement to Pa last night that set him on the alert to be off too. So he didn't go to bed at all, but just lay down in the smoking-room—and I put his traps together quite early, and got him some breakfast, and had him all trim and ready when the Vessel came to fetch him. They've not been very long gone, and Pa ain't well either ; but he would go, though it wouldn't kill me with wonder to see him coming back again when he smells the briny, or even before it. La! nothing's a bit wonderful in this house. We're all queer."

Very queer *she* was, certainly, with her bared arms and covered head, and eyes rolling and squinting every way together ; partly for oddity, partly in quest of the dust against which she waged such perpetual warfare.

"The Kissie slept here last night," she went on, "and was screaming out first thing this morning to send a telegram to her maid to bring her some clothes. There's a sight upstairs now you'd die if you saw ! She and the Step sitting up together in the big four-poster, without any complexions, and each with a tray of savouries before her, tucking in like old boots ! Miladi can't eat when her stays are on, but without them she can go ahead, and leave wreckage enough to remind one of the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts. I hope the maid will manage to forget her face-improvers ; for, mind you, she'd do anything rather than ask the Step for hers. They're great friends and all that, but one wouldn't paint before the other if she got a fortune for it. Wait till she comes down by-and-by,—miladi, I mean. When she sees Sankey, she'll faint ; that is, if there's a man in the way to fall upon. She once fainted on *me*,—just once. I laid her quietly down in the coal-scuttle, and she never did it again. Capital plan ! I'll recommend it, or take out a patent. Now read the papers—there they are—till I come back. I'll not be any time, and you and I'll breakfast together ; ham and eggs, and crumpets and coffee. No kickshaws ; they're bad for the liver. And Sankey shall have a bone."

How thoroughly Honor enjoyed that meal, rough and ready though it was! and with what appetite she partook of it! There were no dainties of any sort, no attendants present, only Bet to keep her company; Bet, still handkerchief-garnished, one elbow almost through the sleeve of her yellow cotton gown, feet slipshod and untidy, and a thousand odd sayings coming in bewildering succession from her wide ruddy mouth. But oh! the pleasure of freedom, the absence of constraint, the delight of having the blinds up, the sunlight streaming into the room, the windows open, the morning air blowing pleasantly in, no eye-glasses levelled to stare at her—although her clear, fine-grained complexion would well have borne any amount of close scrutiny, even by broadest daylight—no questioning, lecturing, or planning for the succeeding hours—and, above all, Sancho permitted to lie at her feet, or to sit beside her, licking his slobbering lips, and occasionally thrusting out a surprising length of pink tongue in token of hungry anticipation. It was the pleasantest hour, one excepted, which she had passed since her guardian's death and the transference of her beloved Nutley to other hands. The homely fare disappeared in a marvellously rapid manner. Never was coffee accounted so delicious, or bread and butter so nice; and Honor, gradually throwing off her shyness in the presence of her strange yet friendly companion, found herself talking quite as fast as she ate, and enjoying conversation almost as much as food.

It was quite ten o'clock when they rose from table, and Bet, handkerchief and all, went to the window to look out.

"It's a fine day," she said, shading her eyes as the sunshafts smote them; "I hope you'll enjoy your riding-lesson. The Step can't go; she's got the gout this morning—always does after a run of dinners—but she calls it a weak ankle, and ignorant folks believe her. I wonder is hot lobster a good joint-strengthener? She's had a lot of it for breakfast. Perhaps the Kissie will be told off to accompany you. I expect she will, and be bade bring the Step an account of how much or how little you know."

"I wish you would come instead," said Honor, caressing Sancho, because she knew her opportunities for doing so would be few and limited. "Can you not manage it?"

"Me!" ejaculated Bet, with her odd little laugh; "I don't know a thing about riding, except a tricycle. You might be on your horse's back, or on his tail, or between his ears, for what

I'd be able to tell. All I know is, that whenever I rode Ram-joggle, I was oftener on the ground than anywhere else. Oh, no; I'm no good at all; but miladi will do first-rate. Wait till you see her mounted some day, my dear. She gets herself melted into her riding habit, and has to be hoisted up, body and bones, into the saddle, because she can't stretch her hand to the pommel if she were to die for it. Then, when she's up, she either walks her horse or canters him; she can't trot a yard."

"Can't trot!" echoed Honor, to whom such a want of capacity appeared incomprehensible.

"Not a yard," repeated Bet, breathing on a girandole and polishing it with the silk handkerchief, pulled for the purpose from her head; "she's too tightly laced to attempt the rise, and the 'bump, bump,' or cavalry touch, don't look elegant. You just set her going some day, and if the tailor hasn't a job after it, and the apothecary, too, I'm an archbishop. Hallo! what's that at the door? A cab! Pa back, I declare! Didn't I guess he'd shirk the cockle-bed with that fresh wind out, and a pain in his side. Blest if he isn't driving away again, slapping his pockets all round. Forgot something at the station, I'll lay a wager. Anyway, he's back, and I'll have a busy day of it, with one thing and another. What's this next disturbance?"

It was the page boy—red from recent tubbing—to announce that Mrs. Blount would wish to see Miss Bright above stairs, as soon as possible.

"I can't go up with you," said Bet, interpreting Honor's imploring glance; "twouldn't do—but I'll come after. Don't be afraid. Go ahead. You know the room. Leave Sankey here, or there'll be dead meat to carry out by-and-by." And the speaker expanded her lips again within an inch of the girandole, and polished away at it like a boot.

Slowly, and with extreme reluctance, Honor obeyed the summons she had received. With lagging footsteps and heavy heart she ascended the stairs, to face the unwished-for ordeal of an interview with Mrs. Blount.

The room which she entered was so darkened by heavy curtains, drawn completely across, and pinned together to keep out the light, that for a moment her eyes—accustomed to the sunshine—could distinguish nothing amid the universal gloom. Gradually, however, she ascertained that her hostess was sitting propped up, in the centre of a big bedstead, which was covered

with a very gorgeous satin quilt; and discerned also that an ermine mantle was cast about the shoulders of the occupant, and that a lace shawl enveloped her head. Features and complexion were alike obscured.

"Well, is that you, child?" said the invalid, speaking in an interesting murmur, and ending up with a groan. "I actually cannot stir this morning; a bad sprain I gave my ankle, years ago, when trying a new valse step with Prince Polyglot. Too bad it should come on again just now, and Blount gone to that vile hole, Ireland, this morning."

Honor wanted to say that he had not really gone at all, and to add also that she was sorry for her hostess's indisposition, but the compliment paid to her unhappy country tied her tongue. Sprain, suffering, Prince Polyglot, faded from before her; they were all as nothing compared with the affront offered to the land of her birth. Silent and motionless she stood—her slight, black-clad figure a good deal drawn up, and an angry glow upon her well-curved lips, which, however, the gloom served to hide. If she had any thought, save one of offended dignity, it was that the proprietor of the sprained ankle would have fared better by her husband's continued absence than she was likely to do by his return, it being his custom when at home to keep her, in conjunction with everybody else, moving about in perpetual attendance upon him, without any sort of regard for the fact that feet and legs were occasionally quite capable of experiencing fatigue.

"Of course, if you don't *care* whether I am ill or not, as your silence seems to imply," went on Mrs. Blount, with fretful peevishness, "you are perfectly right not to pretend any feeling about the matter; at the same time I think—and I thought in that dismal den Nutley—that you are, and were, the most callous young person it has ever been my lot to come across! I believe you don't know what it is to feel. All the better for yourself, no doubt, but not by any means nice, and decidedly not very lovable."

Too hurt now to utter a word, Honor stood in frozen silence, her figure more erect than ever, her head held well in the air. She could not say that she was sorry, with such bitterness at her heart. The words would have choked her. Mrs. Blount groped beneath the pillow for her pocket-handkerchief, and sniffed behind it for a moment or two ere she spoke again.

"I wanted to say to you," she presently continued, speaking as though every word were wrapped in ice and laid out upon a

cold slab, "that, as I am disabled this morning, for which it is clear"—resentfully—"you care nothing at all, Lady Kissie has been good enough to offer to accompany you to the riding-school, and see you take your lesson; she is now in my dressing-room, preparing to start, and the brougham will soon be round. Go, please, and get ready."

Honor, whose gentle nature was never angry for long, and who was really too kind not to sympathize with suffering, in whatever form it might appear, was striving to thaw her stiff lips into an expression of condolence which, had it been uttered, would doubtless have considerably mollified the offended matron—when an exclamation from that aggrieved personage, followed by a yell, a shriek, and sundry frantic invectives, mingled with a torrent of small screams, and diversified by an occasional stupendous howl, paralysed the girl where she stood, and made her incapable of doing anything by which to lessen the terror that had seized upon her companion. The cause was soon apparent. Sancho, full of wiles as of affection, had stolen away from Bet, and followed his mistress to her destination, where, finding the door ajar, he had quietly intruded himself, and having eyed unobserved the comforts of the satin quilt, beneath which the graceful Helen was reposing her dainty limbs, had leaped leisurely upon it, worked his nose under the border, and was then making violent efforts to insinuate the whole of his person there also.

"Oh! Ah! Yah! Boo! Oh-o-o-o-o!" screamed Mrs. Blount, fairly beside herself with rage and terror, and laying about her with her long arms like the sails of a mill. "Ya-a-ah! I shall die, I know I shall! I'll put that brute out to-morrow; and you, too, you unfeeling girl, for bringing him purposely to kill me!"

"No, you won't," said a quaint, quiet voice, which sounded in Honor's ears like the sweetest music she had ever heard. "What is it but a poor quiet dog? and cleaner than a lot of us, I dare say. Stop still, and don't be a baby, or I'll put a bib on you, and engage a nurse at once. Here, Honor! take your dog away, and get ready to go out. I'll look closer after him next time, and keep him from frightening my patient."

And with the oddest little laugh in the world, Bet, the omnipresent, smoothed the disarranged coverlet, and patted her step-mother on the back, and "plumped-up" the pillows, and flew for water, and for something strong to put into it too; and alto-

gether set things right, and made a pleasant commotion, in the midst of which she shouldered Honor out of the room, and quietly shut the door upon her and her black companion.

"I'll tell you what it is," she said, as fifteen minutes later she stood in her new friend's chamber, assisting her to prepare for her drive; "you'll have to put an extinguisher, now and again, on Sankey, or he'll be wanted some fine morning, and there'll be new tit-bits in the cat's-meat man's cart, or a fresh lot of sausages made up on the nearest premises. There, don't look wretched; it's no good. I'll do my best with the box-ottoman and the kitchen-press, and I don't mind a kitten or two, if they'll help to keep him quiet; but, all the same, I wish for his own sake he had stopped at Nutley, and filled himself with hickories every day of his life, in company with the hedgehogs, and weasels, and polecats, and things, that the Step says give a lively interest to that blessed place. Now, come along, if you're ready. The maid brought miladi her complexion as well as her togs, for she's looking like a red June rose."

So she certainly was, standing in the library, where they found her, in sapphire-blue velvet, feather-trimmed and warm, for the day was somewhat chilly for her delicate organization. She wore a dainty little bonnet of blue straw, with a gold-spangled veil wound becomingly about it. Altogether, she looked excessively killing; and, if it were for Mr. Whippem's benefit that she had got up thus, that gentleman could not possibly do less than fall down, stricken, before the brightness of her charms. Her salutation of Honor was most friendly and emphatic, and she chatted to her with engaging grace, as they two, accompanied by Bet—who, purposely to shock her, had resumed her handkerchief, and had thrust her elbow entirely through its hitherto doubtful covering—descended the flight of stairs that led to the hall.

"Are you certain you are not forgetting anything?" queried the beauty, pausing midway. "Are you not taking a riding-habit, even an old one, just to learn in?"

Honor answered that she had not brought any of her riding-gear from home, sighing heavily as she uttered the last words—and Bet broke in with,

"Never mind! you won't want it. They'll put you in a bag. Yes, they will; don't faint, for there's only me to catch you, and fashionable ladies always want a man, or sometimes two. What do I mean by a bag? Oh, wait and see. They call it a

skirt ; a thing without any shape, and a string in it to tie round your waist. Then you're dressed, quite convenient ; and, the next thing, they'll jig you round and round in a circle till your nose is red, and you'll have to flour it, like Lady Kissie's."

"I shall feel indebted to you if you will leave all allusion to my features entirely out of your conversation," said her ladyship, loftily. "Perhaps, if your own nose were to be as freely commented on, you would not find it paid many compliments."

"Oh, I know very well it ain't a beauty," answered Bet, squinting horribly at the organ in question, and laughing inwardly. "It's a birthday present I got, though, and so I can't fall out with it. Go along now, the pair o' you, or the horse will get a cold in his head, and want *his* nose floured, to do away with the redness of sneezing!" And, laying hold of Sancho by the collar, she whirled that astonished quadruped into the breakfast-room, and, going in herself, shut the door with a bang that resounded all over the house, and set the hall-gong quivering and groaning in a weird and uncomfortable manner.

"I wonder she didn't come to the street-door to display herself in that remarkable costume!" exclaimed the beauty, in sneering accents, mingled with wrath.

But Bet had contrived to gratify her own peculiar whim. She was standing heroically at the window, kissing hands to them, with her bare white elbow displayed above the blind, and the obnoxious handkerchief twisted up like a weathercock upon the top of her head.

Often afterwards did Honor recall the varied occurrences of the next few hours. First of all Lady Kissie proposed that she (Miss Bright) should sit on the opposite seat of the carriage, with her back to the horse, lest her own dainty toilette should in any way suffer from contact with a black one. Then she elevated her feet upon the cushions, and drew up the windows to keep out the draught. Then she stopped at different places, chiefly shops and libraries—and while the footman went in on her errands, she contrived to espy half-a-dozen of well-dressed men, with whom she laughed and chattered in a gay and artless manner. It was observable that to each of these by turns she asked the same question: "What was he going to do that evening?" If the answer signified an engagement, her ladyship declared that, "Oh dear! she was so very sorry! She was just about to offer him a seat in her own private opera-box, or invite

him to make a fourth, or sixth, as the case might be, at a quiet little impromptu dinner at the villa." If, on the contrary, he happened to have nothing particular on hand to occupy him, and began to look expectant, my lady smiled sweetly, and, affecting surprise, comforted him—not with an invitation—but with the sugary assurance that she had always felt *certain* that he, such an acquisition, had engagements for every night in the week.

Once, during their peregrinations, she got fairly caught,—at least, Honor in her innocence thought so. A tall man, with big fierce moustaches and bold black eyes, who escorted the beauty from the door of a florist's tempting shop, was asked the accustomed question as he handed her into the carriage, with the result that as soon as the anticipated "engagement" was pleaded, her ladyship at once found out that she had a vacant seat in her opera-box to place at his disposal.

"Too bad, is it not?" pouted the winsome Vine, who evidently wanted to be particularly gracious to this especial representative of Her Majesty's forces; "you are positively always engaged! I shall grow quite angry the next time I invite you and am refused." And the fowling-pieces grew absolutely tender as she levelled them straight at the game she was determined to wound.

The soft-hearted Guardsman was touched.

"Then," he said, bowing so low that his hat threatened to fall into Honor's lap, "to save myself from the horrors of so great a calamity, I shall forego my engagement for this evening, and be found a faithful attendant at the door of your box. May I ask what number, and on which tier?"

For a second only—the very briefest—miladi seemed to hesitate; then she scribbled something on her tablets, and handed it to him to read. He did so, copied the writing hurriedly on one of his own cards, and with a meaning glance from his aggressive eyes, gave a final look—one of many—from under them at his charmer's silent companion, and bowed himself away.

Evidently her ladyship was out of sorts as the carriage again rolled onwards, and as evidently her thoughts were occupied by some knotty theme. What this was, Honor learned later on, when, on the return journey, the vehicle pulled up at a telegraph office, and Lady Kissie sent the footman to fetch her a form, on which she hastily scribbled a few words, delivering it again to him, with an order to have it despatched at once.

Presently the man came back with a puzzled face, and the piece of black-lined paper still in his hand.

"If you please, my lady," he said, presenting it to the writer, "they can't make out the first two words on the second line. 'Suddenly ill,' or 'several oils,'—which is it, my lady?"

"Stupid!" exclaimed the irate beauty, almost snatching it from his hand. "Can't they read plain writing? I'll go in myself." And, gathering up her sapphire skirts, she bounced out of the brougham and disappeared within the office, where she remained a good five minutes, and then bounced back again, with a much smoother countenance than she had worn when entering.

Previous to this, however, Honor had endured upwards of an hour of suffering, which would have been intense had it not been that a spice of amusement was mingled with the annoyance. Mr. Whippem's establishment was a novelty of which she had caught but a glimpse on the occasion of her previous visit. The riding-school was a long enclosure—precisely, she thought, like a respectable shed—with a sloping roof, in which narrow windows were set, and white-washed walls, with a thick panelling of straw extending midway up, to save heads from being broken, or limbs damaged, when owners of these useful articles were shot from the backs of festive and frolicsome steeds. There were three or four small receptacles, like theatre-boxes, situated at one side, evidently intended for spectators, as Lady Kissie was ushered into one of them. There was a big double doorway at an opposite angle, for the entrance and exit of horses; the flooring was spread with a quantity of tan; and, directly facing the auditorium, there were three round holes in the wall, placed one above the other at a distance of half a foot, or so, to serve as resting-places, or "holds," for the jumping-bar, and to regulate the height of it.

Lastly, there was the great master-rider himself, loose of gait and very tight of gaiters, with a well-brushed hat on his head, and varnished boots on his feet, and a considerable quantity of swagger between the two.

Honor spent ten hot minutes shut into a little dressing-closet, striving to get herself into the "bag" so graphically described by Bet, which was in reality nothing more wonderful than a brown holland skirt, apparently without seam or shape, with a loose running-string at the top, and a shotted band round the bottom to keep it from rucking up. A loquacious young woman,

who was bursting out of all her seams, and who had an untidy head, and a perfume of steak and onions, assisted her to dress by putting the bag the wrong way on first, and then pulling it off over her head, taking half her hair down along with it. The young woman breathed on her a good deal, too, warming up over her work—and altogether the help which she rendered was not efficient, and might have been dispensed with.

When the pupil was ready, the voluble virgin who had been her assistant conducted her to a small doorway which led into the school, and discovered Mr. Whippem, standing like Romeo beneath Lady Kissie's box; while the beauty, posing like Juliet in the balcony-scene, leaned gracefully upon the faded velvet valance, and sent words and glances down to her hero in the tan.

Then a depressed steed, with a long tail and a dejected eye, was led in by a groom, and after some delay (caused by Lady Kissie's fervent anxiety to inspect the mount) Honor was put up. The first attempt was not altogether a successful one, for the girl—light as a bird—made a spring (as she had always been accustomed to do), when her hand had securely grasped the pommel—and the master, entirely unprepared for this unwonted display of agility on the part of a supposed beginner, gave her at the same instant a tremendous “hoist-up,” and sent her clean over the saddle, causing her to fall in the tan, and startle the long-tailed steed out of a good deal of his dejection. This catastrophe occasioned great consternation in the breast of the tightly-braced *maestro*—amusement, scarcely concealed to the grinning groom—and intense delight and diversion to the sprightly Juliet, who fairly capered behind her balcony with joy at the unexpected event.

A second attempt was equally unsuccessful—for this time, Honor, warned by recent occurrences, made no spring at all, and the master, expecting a renewal of her former supple action, made scarcely any effort at assisting her; the consequence of which united misunderstanding was, that the pupil hung fire midway, and (like the noble Duke of York, who marched his historic army halfway up the hill and left them there) she was neither up nor down.”

The third effort was happily effectual, and the confused *maestro*—very red and perspiring from his exertions, with his shining hat knocked over his eyes, and a good deal ruffled, like

his temper, by contact with unexpected obstacles—exclaimed, as he handed her the reins,

“Always the same with beginners, the difficulties commence with the mounting. It requires practice and *method*. You will be able to accomplish it by-and-by.”

And he took off his injured hat to restore its gloss with his coat-sleeve, and produced another species of polish upon his forehead, by rubbing it vigorously with a silk pocket-handkerchief, which smelled of patchouli and had a red border.

Honor said nothing. Vexed as she was, and hurt, too, bodily and otherwise, there was a ludicrous side to the picture, at which she felt strongly disposed to laugh. There was, indeed, a lurking smile, which she vainly endeavoured to repress, playing about the corners of her mobile mouth, as the riding-master, with a stupendous show of fuss and consequence, proceeded to explain to her the uses of the reins, the correct method of holding them, the difference between the curb and the snaffle, the way to sit on her saddle, the uses and abuses of the leaping-head, and the neatest fashion for carrying the whip, together with a variety of extra hints, instructions, and injunctions, to all of which she dutifully listened, being then permitted to walk her steed quietly around the limited precincts of the school, with a rein tucked well in between each separate finger of her left hand, and an ash-plant held point upwards in her right.

When this edifying performance had been sufficiently rehearsed, she was allowed to trot: that is, the steed trotted, and the pupil, obeying orders, bumped miserably in the saddle, not daring to attempt the rise, until her face grew hot and flushed, her head ached, her neatly arranged hair tumbled about her shoulders, and her discomforts were complete. Then the order was given to canter, which would have been a relief had the melancholy quadruped possessed even a faint knowledge of how to accomplish his work; but, as his idea of the exercise meant leading with the wrong leg, going on his shoulders, performing a cross-legged movement, and frequently slipping up, wherever the *tan* happened to be less lavishly spread than in other places, the moments devoted to the canter were not characterized by anything bordering upon complete bliss.

Then there was more walking, more trotting, more directions, with Lady Kissie leaning over her balcony, listening and smiling, and evidently much amused; and, finally, Honor was lifted

down, very sore and dishevelled, and permitted to exchange the "bag" for her ordinary clothing : being once more impeded and breathed upon by the savoury young woman, while Romeo and Juliet rehearsed again outside.

When Honor reappeared, Juliet quitted her balcony, and tripped to meet her, while Romeo, hat in hand, looked as though he were sorry that his headpiece had not a feather in it, and trailed his left leg across the tan to congratulate her on having "done so well for a beginner"—after which the two ladies re-entered their brougham, while the poetic riding-master, evidently smitten by the fowling-pieces, and beginning to languish, stood in a graceful, high-shouldered attitude upon the pavement, his left leg still a good bit behind the right, until the carriage turned the corner and was out of sight. Then he gave up languishing, pulled himself into proper form, and went indoors to console himself with bottled stout.

CHAPTER XXI.

As the vehicle in which Honor and Lady Kissie were seated turned the corner at St. George's Hospital, a veiled figure suddenly emerged from the doorway of Colonel Blount's house, and, catching sight of the brougham and its occupants when retreat was too late, turned hurriedly and with resolute mien towards the windows of the big building, and, breaking into a run, darted away like the wind.

The figure, which was well-made and full of pliant grace, was plainly but fashionably attired in an unpretentious suit of dark navy-serge, and wore a neat, close-fitting bonnet, with a veil of purple gauze wound clingingly about it. Over the left arm a light macintosh was systematically folded, and the right hand was occupied in carrying a basket—evidently well filled, for, from the half-open lid, appeared protruding the curly head and bizarre clothing of the negro-doll which Bet had occupied herself in dressing an evening or two before.

Honor leaned forward in the carriage, and gazed interestedly after the flying figure.

"Surely that was Miss Blount?" she said, turning in surprise to Lady Kissie, whose eyeglass was levelled at a group of officers who were chatting on the pavement and smoking cigarettes. "I cannot be mistaken?"

"No, you are not," said the beauty quietly, and laughing a little malicious laugh, as though she were enjoying something immensely funny. "She is sold for once: thought to steal out unobserved, and did not calculate on our being back so soon. Dear me! Only fancy—I was sure that man with the grey trousers was Captain Busby. How absurd if I had bowed!"

"But—but—" hesitated Honor, whose thoughts were on Bet, and not on Busby, "she looked quite smart and fashionable; so very unlike——"

"Herself," finished Lady Kissie, gathering up her skirts, as the vehicle stopped at the doorway, and the illiterate footman—

still smarting under a sense of wounded dignity—loftily assisted them to alight; “quite so, but she is going among goodies now; *we* are all savages, not worth dressing for, and she behaves like one when we are by. She is off, I’ll warrant, to a bazaar, or some such thing: most likely to that sale of work to be held this afternoon at Knightsbridge, in aid of the Home for Crooked-limbed Children—and all those outlandish manufactures of hers will be sold there. She thinks nobody knows; but I could tell you a thing or two, if I had time. The girl’s mad. Now, don’t begin to question me, for I have barely a moment to ask for Mrs. Blount; and then I drive down to the Orleans, and sha’n’t be back until to-morrow.”

Later on, when the day was pretty far spent, and society in Mayfair and Belgravia was crowding home from the Academy, and discussing afternoon tea and talk, with raised voices and lowered blinds—Honor was resting, deliciously alone, scarcely able to believe in the good fortune which left her free to indulge in so unaccustomed a luxury. Her hostess was still in bed, dozing quietly off and on, with a large supply of cotton-wool enveloping her sprained foot, and a box of gout-pills under her pillow. Colonel Blount, after granting all luncheon-time over the discomforts of the cross-channel passage, and the evils of a disordered organization—moaning about his ailments, grumbling about the wind, finding fault with everything at table, railing at the cook, scolding the butler, terrifying the page, snapping crossly at Honor herself, and kicking savagely at her dog in a wanton and unprovoked manner—had finally called up every available individual within summoning distance to lavish attendance upon him while he prepared to go out, and, having relieved himself of some strong language in connection with the simultaneous absence of his two slaves, his wife and daughter, had at length lounged lazily into his victoria, and driven off—grumbling and smoking together.

His is no fancy sketch, no imaginary character. He has actually lived, does still, for aught can be known to the contrary, precisely as here depicted. Hawthorne observes that when a man is a brute he is the most loathsome of all brutes. This, perhaps, bears reference to the drunkard, unclean person, and sot, yet such are not one whit more abhorrent than the sober man who treats those about him as though they were his servants, and drives from his own hearth that domestic happiness which is said to be the only bliss of Paradise that has survived the

fall. Kindness is a good investment at all times and places, but nowhere better than at home. There, above all others, is it bread cast upon the waters, to return a hundredfold in the love which it engenders. If a man, or woman, does not possess the hearts of those whom ties of kindred have gathered about the fireside, he, or she, is a miserable bankrupt—though the riches that are theirs may be, like those of Solomon, past counting up.

It was over such truths as these that Honor was thinking and dreaming, as she lay at welcome ease in the quiet library, surrounded by books which she cared not to read, and luxuries at which she cast not a single glance. The luxury of being entirely *alone* was the greatest that could be offered her; the only books she wanted were those of which her own reflections formed the pages.

Stretched luxuriously upon a soft, wide couch, her hands clasped beneath her head, which was laid upon the cushions, and her dog sleeping lazily at full-length beside her, she lay in the full enjoyment of immunity from disturbance or call. Solitude at Nutley had not been a thing so highly accounted of or prized; *there* some hours of it had been a certain daily enjoyment, as secure and almost as necessary as her daily food. Here it was only to be snatched by odd and stolen moments—sometimes, for days together, not to be enjoyed at all. The present period of it was one of restful happiness, unexpected as it was rare, and only brought about by a train of circumstances which might not for long occur again.

Strong warm sunlight looked boldly in through the unblinded windows, audaciously kissing the tints of her soft hair, and throwing out in bold relief the curves and outlines of her sweet, restful face, and young, lissom figure. An early summer fly buzzed upon the window-pane—beginning at the top, and going “whiz, whiz,” all the way down to the bottom, where he walked sedately for an instant upon the sun-painted sash, and then whirled away up to the top again, to descend as before. There was otherwise perfect quietude in the room. It was one of those situated at the rear of the house, and to its hidden depths no noise seemed to penetrate.

The jolting and excitement of the morning’s riding-lesson began to tell upon the occupant of the couch, by sundry closings of the eyes, and short, dreamy nappings. All the surroundings were somniferous. She had fallen almost entirely asleep, when the quiet opening of the door made her look up, and the next instant she

was on her feet—couch, cushions, thoughts, slumber, even the sunshine forgotten, in the flood of it which seemed to enter with the figure, standing half confident, yet irresolute, in the aperture. It was a tall, broad-shouldered, manly one—clad in russet brown—and a hat and gloves were in one hand, while the other grasped the handle of the door and held it ajar.

“May I come in?” asked Deverill, for it was he. And, without waiting for the answer which the glad lips scarcely knew how to frame, he had entered and shut himself in, alone with the girl with whom he had wandered and whispered in Meadow Lane.

“Are we to shake hands?” was his first query, spoken a little doubtfully, as he paused two or three yards away from where she stood.

“By all means,” she answered, ingenuously, and gave him her hand, which he greedily grasped. “Why not?”

He shrugged his wide shoulders, with a stunted smile. “I don’t quite know; but our parting was not satisfactory, and yesterday you were engaged.”

“So were you,” she replied, looking steadily at him, as he winced a little at her words.

“True,” he said, “I was.” And then followed a pause, while he laid aside his hat and gloves, renewed acquaintance with Sancho, and provided himself with a chair, as comfortable as any which Colonel Blount could have selected, having first seen Honor demurely re-seated upon her couch.

“In the first place,” he said, starting suddenly up from a very luxurious posture—“confound that fly! You remember how I used to anathematize them in dear old Dublin. No, you don’t; of course not; how could you? It was winter then, and no flies—but I always *did* hate them.”

Then commenced that absurd warfare which is sometimes seen betwixt creatures human and insectile, in which the latter so often come off victorious. The man stood on a chair and lashed the window with his handkerchief, and the fly, buzzing, whirring, and evading every blow, was looking down composedly from the top pane when his enemy was at the bottom, and was taking a walk on the lowest sash when the handkerchief was slashing most vigorously at the top. Finally it soared away upwards, and commenced winking at him from a distant corner of the ceiling.

“It’s of no use,” said Deverill, sinking exhaustedly into the

depths of his easy-chair. "That's a female fly, I'll be bound; lures a fellow on, and then laughs at him! A happy thing is a fly—very! and so light-hearted that it goes about tickling everybody. Little beast! I suppose you are wondering, Miss Honor, how I just chanced upon you alone?" he continued, caressing Sancho, whose friendly paws were laid against his knee. "It was not altogether chance, however. I have prowled about here a good deal since you have come to town, but fortune was never kind to me until to-day. I thank her. She is good at last."

Honor looked down, uncertain what to say; but presently looked up again, and met his eyes, which were gazing at her.

"Have you seen your mother?" she inquired, taking refuge in commonplaces as a safeguard against romance, which she feared might be treading upon the threshold.

"No; I am told she is not visible this afternoon."

"But surely she will see *you*. Allow me——"

He stretched out his hand and stopped her, as she rose to leave the room.

"Don't go. My mother is asleep. I have, of course, inquired. By-and-by, when she wakens, I can go to her."

"Colonel Blount is out," went on Honor, giving her information in a dry, every-day tone, "and so is Bet—Miss Blount, I mean."

"Yes, I knew it when I came. I saw them go. You see, my prowlings have been rather prolonged."

"You will meet them, I suppose, at dinner," said Honor, still in a monotone. "I cannot invite you, but of course you will stay—or return."

He shook his head.

"I cannot to-day."

"You are engaged, I presume?"

His voice sounded colder than ever, coming up from a heart on which a wintry chill—one of disappointment—had fallen.

"No," he answered, "I am not engaged."

And then he got up and went to the window, where his foe was victoriously buzzing, and returned and sat down again, and encouraged Sancho's familiarities, and again repressed them, as though his thoughts were wandering wide. Presently he spoke, suddenly and with effort.

"Miss Bright, there is something I must say to you, and which you must, sooner or later, come to know, because the queerest fate in the world has thrown you here among the people of this

strange house. Well, I can never be a guest in it when the man who is master is at home. When he is away I—I sometimes come, and may do so now and again, because my mother wishes it; but when *he* is here—never.”

He was pulling hard at the spaniel’s silky ears as he finished the sentence, and Honor could see that he was evidently very ill at ease.

“I thought there was something,” was all she said, too lady-like and finely bred to ask for information, the giving of which might cause pain or embarrassment to another. He pushed the dog from him again, and looked up.

“You have a right to know something of how matters are,” he went on a little hurriedly; “in fact, you *must* know; there is no help for it, as you are here; and perhaps it is as well, or better, that you should learn from me as from—from—how shall I say it?—somebody less interested in you. I disapproved of my mother’s marriage—a son sometimes has a right to do so—on certain grounds. My stepfather knew this from the beginning, knows it now, and we are not cordial. That was why I did not stop at Nutley; it is my reason, too, for not remaining here to-day. I hate to speak of these things to you,” he continued, writhing his head as though in physical pain, “I do, indeed; but there seems to be no help for it, except through the possibility of worse. Tell me—you said on the day I last spoke with you that, whatever Colonel Blount might be to others, to you personally he was kind. Does he continue so? Has he been otherwise—yet?”

The last word came out as though something forced it, against the speaker’s will. Honor shuddered as she listened.

“This house is his,” she answered, in low but steady tones. “You see what it is—you know its luxuries. Well, he gives me a home in it. What more can I say?”

“You can tell me whether he is *kind*. I need not explain what the word signifies. Remember, I know him.”

“Oh, please do not question me so closely!” pleaded the girl, in distressed tones. “I am eating his bread—living on him. How can I complain?” And for a single instant her slender hands went up over her face, which quivered with momentary pain. “I do not think he means to be unkind,” she faltered out; “his manner is—is—ungentle, but he is the same to others as to me, or nearly so. Perhaps his delicacy may cause it. In any case, I have no right to murmur, and I don’t.”

Deverill jumped up from his chair, and, thrusting his hands in the pockets of his short coat, began to walk about the room.

"I guessed how it would be," he said, every word sounding as though wrung out in gall; "I suppose that man I saw with you at the Academy yesterday is laid out for you by him, or by his wife—unfortunately it is the same thing which of them makes the plan: it is certain to be carried out."

Honor was silent from sheer shame. That what he surmised was true, her humbled heart too plainly told her.

"I thought so," continued her companion, with a short, mirthless laugh. "Great heavens above us! how soon they have begun! And you," he continued, turning almost fiercely upon her—"what say you to the bargain? You are satisfied, I suppose, or must learn to be. It looked like it. Well, he has a prefix to his name; what matter about the rest?"

The girl rose up, with hot cheeks and indignant gesture.

"Major Deverill, you forget yourself. I may be a pauper—I am one—but I am not merchandise. Am I to meet with nothing but affront beneath this most miserable roof? Allow me, please, to pass. I cannot remain longer in the room."

"And you are willing to leave me in this way?" he said, sadly, as she swept to the door.

"You force me to it; you offend me," she answered, with her hand upon the lock. "By-and-by, perhaps, I shall be hardened. I may even learn to like it"—with a little wild laugh—"who knows? Everything is so different here."

"Do you think I meant to offend?" he sadly asked. "God knows all that I would do and go through to save you from offence. Perhaps *you* will know—some day. Do not go. Forgive me. I am sorry for what I said."

Her wavering hand quitted the door-handle, and fell nerveless at her side.

"Why did you come here to-day?" she asked, lifting her pure and steadfast eyes to his face. "Was it to——"

"I came," he said, interrupting her, "because I longed to see you again. I cannot tell anything but the truth when I speak to you. I was dying of thirst—I should drink. Now you know. Am I forgiven?"

Her dawning smile answered him, and his fingers sought hers and clasped them in a burning, earnest pressure.

"You care nothing for this gilded popinjay?" he said,

jealously, as he led her back to her seat. "Tell me 'no,' and I shall never think of him again."

"You must fancy women's hearts are easily won," was her gently reproachful answer.

"Then you are quite indifferent to him?"

"Quite."

"And what about the other?" he queried, standing tall and upright upon the hearthrug, while Sancho, seeking notice, wandered round and round about his legs—"that man, I mean, whose letters I found you reading in the pretty Galway lane?"

Honor flushed red in the sunlight, and turned her face aside that he might not see the confusion she would have given worlds to hide. "He—he—left for Ireland this morning," she stammered out.

"Oh, then he has been here? Did you answer the letter you showed me?"

She shook her head.

"I never did."

"Or speak with him about it?"

Again she answered "No."

"Have you seen him often since he wrote it, or only a chance time?"

"Frequently," was her truthful reply.

"Alone, may I ask?"

"Yes. Pray, question me no further. The matter has never been referred to. Let me go and see whether your mother is yet awake? Has she been expecting you to-day?"

"No; certainly not. Do not go. It will be time enough by-and-by."

"Does she know that you are in town?"

"Yes; she had a note from me yesterday morning to that effect; but she knows it would be useless to invite me here, and that my visits are always doubtful. Now, what else have you to ask? Turn about questioning is fair play."

"My questions are not likely to be many," she answered, with a small, fine smile. "But there are one or two things I should like to be told. Have you known Lady Kissie long? and are you acquainted with Bet?"

He threw himself back in his chair, and began pulling vigorously at his well-cultivated moustaches.

"Two questions," he answered, summing up; "to the first—indeed to both—yes."

"How long?" she queried, as though the first alone were in her mind.

"Oh, a very long while indeed. Since I was a small boy, and wore jackets and turn-down collars, and made her and myself sick with candy, and similar abominations."

"And she, what was she like at that time?" asked Honor, with a nervous inward fluttering, which was both painful and new.

"She was a small girl—very small—with a large crinoline and extremely thin legs! Bless me, how thin they were! I can see her now. She had a pair of glorious dark eyes too. They're to the good still."

"And were you—lovers?" The smile, smaller and finer than before, hovered waveringly about the lips from whence the inquiry proceeded.

"Lovers? Gracious goodness! I should think we were. We wore our lips away with kissing, and vowed all sorts of solemn oaths."

"Which you never kept?"

"Oh, yes, we did—for a while. I had half-a-crown a week pocket money, and she had about the same, or something less. Marriage on that amount of wealth, could not, truthfully speaking, have been considered altogether wise."

"No; not very. Well?—You grew up——"

"We did. I got a commission, and enjoyed the splendid income of five shillings and sixpence a day. She did nothing, and enjoyed no income at all. Marriage still a chimera."

"But you continued lovers, nevertheless, of course?"

The kind sunbeams hid themselves in a veil of passing cloud, and left her face in shadow as she ventured the surmise.

"Of course we did. I wore the knees out of all my nether garments, swearing love and constancy; and she wept copiously, on twelve new pocket-handkerchiefs, which I had seen selling cheap, and had bought her for a present. Touching, was it not? Oh, *worry* that fly!" as the insect alighted impudently upon his healthy young forehead. "She's off again, I declare—for it is a 'she,' I'll swear."

"Well, and then?" said Honor, in the same prosaic tones, and with a cheek that was cold and white again, "your story, please. You see I am questioning now."

"Then she met an elderly party (*she* called him a *parti*) with a title, like somebody else I know, and she married him for it, as I am sure somebody else (whom I know) will *not*."

"And you," queried Honor, disregarding or pretending to disregard the insinuation.

"I?—Oh, well, I raved a good deal, and tore my hair, and fell out with my beefsteaks and stout, and grew quite thin on the head of it. Then I got better, made it up with my comestibles, went abroad, and made love to so many that I learnt to forget the one at home."

"You are at least candid," said Honor, a shade of scorn mingling with her naturally gentle tones.

"Of course I am," he replied; "I could not be otherwise with you. I would rather you knew the worst side of me than the best, any day. It is honest. What on earth is that noise? It sounds like a hundred Bedlamites, screaming to be let loose."

"Somebody in the next house practising 'The Battle of Prague,'" answered Honor, with a set smile.

"Lord! It sounds exactly as though it were in the room underneath. I should go mad if I had to listen to that every day. Can't you have it stopped in any way? Get sudden brain fever, and send in a request for silence."

"I fear it would not do." The words and tone were as cold as ice.

He got up angry and impatient, and frowned at the unoffending wall, as though it were entirely responsible for the conveyal of the odious sounds. Nor was his wrath unreasonable. Of all the false household gods that are not gods, but demons—of all the hideous skeletons that mope and mow in juxtaposition to peaceful dwelling-houses—there is nothing more detestable than a bad piano: an instrument whose keys are heavy and clogged, and refuse to move under any but the most muscular grasp; or whose wires are dumb for harmonious utterance, and find speech only in a loose, short tinkling sound, that is thoughtful enough to die away as soon as produced. Tortures of this description, usually highly polished and showy to the eye, are nothing but melancholy delusive apples of the Dead Sea.

"Do you intend to speak to me any more?" asked Deverill, pausing in his impatient walk, "or am I to be punished by that piano and your silence, both?"

"I really have not anything to say," replied Honor. "I allow that I am but poor company, yet you will not permit me——"

"To leave the room? Certainly not, if I can induce you to remain. The truth is," he added, resuming his seat beside her,

"you are displeased with my conduct, and yet I have told you no wrong of myself. There is not any harm, that I can see, in making love. Were a man of my age and career to say that he had never done so—or had, in fact, lost a single opportunity in that way, or resisted one solitary temptation—he would be branded as a story-teller, or despised for a fool."

Honor was silent, her eyes turned resolutely away from her companion, and a great pain at her heart. Glad as she had always been to see him—and *how* glad none, save herself, knew—their interviews, somehow or another, had invariably led to unsatisfactory results, and terminated in heartburnings and discontent.

"You are vexed with me?" he said, striving to take her hand, which she kept resolutely by her side.

"No. Why should I be? Surely you are your own master."

"But you think less of me for something that I have said. I seem to have a fatuity for showing you my worst side; but indeed I have a better—I really have."

Very subdued and cloud-shadowed now came the sunbeams through the window, glinting on the soft waves of her hair, and on his handsome, earnest features—full, as they were, of present sentiment, yet ever ready to break into a smile. The restless fly buzzed and whirled upon the window-pane, going its strange up-and-down journey. The spaniel, weary of alternate caresses and rebuffs, turned his back upon both, and, retreating to the hearthrug, coiled himself up like a comma, and went to sleep. "The Battle of Prague" raged fiercely on the other side of the partition-wall, and the "cries of the wounded" sounded dismally near. A clock on the mantelpiece chimed five. Honor sat still and silent upon her couch; Deverill beside her.

"Shall I go—must I—with this cloud between us?" he softly asked.

She did not answer; only looked down, and clasped her hands very tightly together, lest possession of one of them should be taken.

"Miss Bright—Honor, you said I might call you by your dear little name—are you very angry with me?"

"No, Major Deverill."

"*Major Deverill!*"—vexedly. "Is it never to be Derrick?"

She looked up in quick surprise, the colour mantling upon her pure white cheeks.

"Assuredly not," she answered. "Why should it be?"

"We need not go into the *whys*," he said, a little coldly; "your refusal is enough. Adieu! I have stayed too long."

He held out his hand. She placed hers within it, and he walked to the door, but turned again with a petulant gesture.

"I *cannot* go," he said, "in this unsatisfactory way. Tell me, at least, why you are angry with me; or why we always seem destined to part with something like a shadow between us?"

"It is not of my creating," she answered, simply. "Nor am I by any means angry with you."

"What, then?"

The girl paused, looking steadily downwards, and toying with the spaniel's silky coat.

"You like candour," she presently said; "you shall have it. I am disappointed. I thought—I hoped—that you were different to other men. I find you are not."

"You thought, in short, that I was a nincompoop, who had gone through life—civil and military—like a friar, or—a stone! And, had I damaged my conscience by telling you that it was so, your innocence would have believed my falsehood, and you and I would have parted on better terms than we do now. Ah, Miss Bright, take what I say for fact: the man who puts on virgin airs, and pretends to the woman he loves that she is the first who has ever attracted his fancy, is a despicable hound, trading on her simplicity, and flaunting false colours in her teeth. The fellow who is, or has been, what the world calls a scamp, and who affects no saintliness, but shows the seamy side rather than the smooth—that is the man with whom to trust your life. When he *loves*, it won't be a cold fancy or a passing whim—but the devotion of a *SOUL*!"

Faster and faster whirled the unquiet fly upon the window-pane; more and more slanting grew the sunbeams—stealing, chastened and mellow, athwart the rich, old-fashioned furniture which the room contained. The "Battle of Prague" ceased at last—the cries of the wounded died away into silence. Only the ticking of the clock was heard when Derrick ceased speaking.

Honor lifted her eyes, and met the honest glow of his. He resumed his seat by her side—his hand sought hers, no longer withholden—quick, hot breathings came from his heaving breast—his lips were unclosed, and again were sealed; passion all but mastered his self-command. Another moment, and words would

have been uttered which must have altered the current of both their lives. But man is a shuttlecock in the hands of fate; his future hangs upon a trifle, his destiny on a thread. A sound startled them, and both sprang up. It was the shutting of a door, that of the room in which they were conversing. Somebody, unseen, had come partially in, and had hastily withdrawn.

Who was it? Neither knew, and both would willingly have discovered. Question and answer brought no satisfactory results. Honor and her companion were alike ignorant of the intruder's identity, and Deverill laughed a little grimly as he took up his hat to go.

"Ghosts abroad, Miss Honor!" he said, resuming his accustomed tone and manner; "or my mother, perhaps, taking a walk for the good of the gout. By Jove! I wonder if it was she!"

Honor shook her head.

"Not probable. She is quite unable to leave her room. Besides, Sancho did not growl, and I fear he would have done so, at her."

"Oh," in a very relieved tone, "a servant, then, perhaps."

"No, there was not any knock. I should have heard it."

"Who, then? The colonel returned?"

"No, I think it was Bet."

"Whew!" whistled Deverill, with a tremendous shrug. "Not much matter about *her*. Extraordinary girl."

"Do you know her well?" asked Honor, without in any wise acquiescing, but with a pardonable shade of curiosity in her tone.

"I fancy I do. Better than anybody else has ever done."

He was looking into the lining of his hat as he spoke, as though seeking for some flaw in it.

"Have you at any time been thrown much in her society?" questioned Honor, with genuine interest,

"I have scarcely seen anything of her for the last two years; and for a good while before that, very little; but when my mother first married Major Blount, she and I mourned together a good deal about the matter, and sympathized, and all that sort of thing. She was a charming girl then, though never a beauty."

"And did she dress strangely, as she does now, and say odd things?"

"Bless you, no! not a bit of it. She was the belle of every

ball and race-meeting. Half the fellows in the Presidency were breaking their hearts, and each others' heads about her. You wouldn't think it, would you?"

Honor regarded him with a keen searching glance.

"Was she one of the many to whom you 'thought it *no harm* to make love?'" she quietly asked.

"Yes; I daresay she was. I really have forgotten: but it wouldn't have been like me to have thrown away a chance, especially one that every other fellow was coveting. We were great chums, I know; but she didn't care a rap about me, nor I about her."

"Did you tell each other so?"

"No. I think we rather pretended the other thing; but of course it was all sham. I bade her good-bye when I was going up-country—in India, you know. It was at, or rather after, a race ball. She was a gorgeous creature then: in 'gloss of satin and glimmer of'—I forget what—*everything*! She was positively resplendent. When I next saw her—here, in England—she was dressed in a bed-curtain, and was mopping out a room, with her sleeves turned up to her elbows, and a green handkerchief on her head! I very nearly had a fit—on my honour! When I looked at her, she squinted, and when I spoke, she hunted me with a mop. I told her next day—jesting, of course—that I had come home to look for a wife, and she recommended me a Zulu, or a woman with a wig! I have never had the courage to speak to her since. Pray, don't look so serious, or I shall go away in the blues. Now, adieu! As I am close by—at Chatham—I shall see you, I hope, soon again: that is, if my 'prowling' proves as fortunate as it has done to-day."

Again he held out his hand, just as he had done when they parted on the Nutley road; she gave him hers in an equally common-place manner; and with a pat for Sancho, and a pleasant bantering word about the chances of encountering ghosts in the flesh, he took his bright face away, and left the room in shadow.

Honor threw herself once more upon the couch, and pressed her fingers upon her eyelids. Was his visit but a dream, or was it palpable reality? Surely the latter, as her heart—glad and troubled together—too plainly told her. Truth to tell, she had suffered herself to like him too well; and he? Well, she did not know—perhaps (oh, humiliation!) she might be "one of the many" whom he had loved, and had yet learned, or would

in time learn, to forget. It must be the purpose of her life to crush him out of it—to quench the fire which Ireland had kindled and fanned, and which had smouldered ever since, although never permitted to spring vitally up.

Lying, still as death, in the yellow light of the sun's fading glory, she recalled her first meeting with Deverill; their brief but sweet acquaintance; the dances they had together; the walks, the rides, the drives; their little jealousies and pets; their first actual quarrel, and subsequent making-up; the flower he gave her when they finally said "Good-bye" across the door—painted dingy red—of growler 842 (in which he had placed her after a luncheon-party at a friend's house), with dirty holland covers upon the cushions, two cracked windows, an anti-teetotal driver, and a strong smell of musty straw. She wanted to forget it all—had hoped that it was, in a measure, forgotten—but the moment, so lately present, in which she met and caught the glow of his speaking eyes, and felt the strong, nervous clasp of his clinging fingers—that moment had revived and linked itself with recollections of what had formerly been cherished as tender and dear. It touched, it awoke a long chain of young and enthusiastic feelings, which arose, perhaps, the fresher from their slumber.

Who, when he turns to recall his first and fondest associations—when he throws off one by one the layers of earth and stone which have grown and hardened, sometimes forcibly, over the records of the past—who has not been surprised to discover how fresh and unimpaired those buried treasures have arisen again within his heart! They have been laid up in the storehouse of Time; they have not perished—their very concealment has preserved them. We remove the lava, and the world of a *gone day* is before us!

It is dangerous for woman, however wise it may be in man, to commune with the heart and be still. This girl, so little skilled in the world's teachings, had felt vexed with the daughter of her host for finding something at which to laugh in her own singular ignorance of matters which, to the mocker, were as household words. She had wanted to be wise—had wished to *know*—to be skilled in the learning which her senses told her could bring no profit with it. Alas! there is no fool like him who wishes for knowledge. It is only through woe that we are taught to reflect, and we gather the honey of worldly wisdom, not from flowers, but thorns.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE evening that succeeded was as quiet as the preceding one had been the reverse. Colonel Blount, complaining of dyspepsia, dined alone in his study. Bet, preoccupied and *distracted*, though evidently striving to be kind, sat—in company with Honor—at the long table which, on a recent occasion, had been so gay, and ate nothing, while pretending to make a great show of appetite. Occasional briefly uttered courtesies, and the almost noiseless tread of the well-trained servants, were the only audible sounds.

While they were taking their coffee, a message came down from Mrs. Blount; she wished to see Miss Bright as soon as convenient. Honor did not wait to finish. She went at once.

The fair Helen was sitting propped up in bed, with every dainty comfort about her, and a well-laden tray by her side; yet with a countenance indicative of anything in the world save contentment or pleasure. Evidently Honor's offence of the morning still rankled in her mind, for it was with an icy gesture that she pointed the girl to a seat.

"I am informed that my son has been here," was her first observation; and the tone in which it was delivered was like a breath from the North Pole.

Honor merely bowed. She knew some unpleasantness was coming, and braced herself to bear it. Mrs. Blount drew the candle, which was burning by her bedside, into such a position as would ensure its light falling full upon her young guest's face, while her own remained pretty well in shadow.

"You saw him," she said; "in short, he asked for you at the door, and your interview was, I am told, a pretty long one. May I ask for some information concerning your former acquaintance with him? I have not, of course, been without hearing of his visit of *condolence*"—spoken sneeringly—"to that charming Galway mansion: a nice scandal for the county to get hold of, if one cared about the petty tongues that wag in such God-forsaken holes. Now commence, please, and go on with all that you have to tell."

Honor, with cheeks unnaturally whitened by suppressed anger, gave utterance to a few brief words as requested; the truth, certainly, but with the most important truths concealed. Her hostess listened, with lips tightly compressed, and then unclosed them to say—

“You mean me to understand that you have met but twice since the termination of that Dublin acquaintance: once in Galway, and again in the library here to-day?”

Honor bowed, but immediately corrected herself.

“I forgot,” she said; “we met, and he spoke to me, at the Academy yesterday afternoon.”

Evidently this was news of a totally unexpected character, for the recipient of it sat up, first very straight to listen, and then leaned forward in eager questioning. Honor told her, without reserve, precisely what had occurred, and who his companion had been. That the latter intelligence was a blow as well as a surprise was plainly evident, although the worldly woman who received it hid her feelings as only a skilled dissembler could. The narration of the actual facts caused her less displeasure than the mortifying discovery that her bosom-friend had played her false. She caught, however, at a straw of hope, and struggled on to it in the girl's full view.

“You may have been mistaken in the lady's identity,” she said, striving to speak carelessly, and making a wry face as the gout gave her a ruthless twinge; “in fact, you must have been. You heard Mr. Jessell say last evening that Lady Kissie was too ill to receive him at luncheon, and you heard later on from herself that she only left her bed in time to dress for dinner.”

“She was at the Academy with Major Deverill,” repeated Honor, with quiet determination.

“Please inform me—did you speak with her?”

“No; but I——”

“Then it was not she at all?” snapped Mrs. Blount, her words ending in a groan, as her enemy again reminded her of his presence. “Your eyes played you a trick!”

“Very well,” said Honor, calmly; “I shall not contradict you.”

“It matters extremely little one way or the other. I am sure *I* don't care an atom about the affair,” pouted the aggrieved matron, affecting an indifference she was far from feeling; “it is of no consequence to me who or what companions my son chooses to select. He is not under my control, nor am I likely to be consulted. Now, may I ask you—and, mind, I expect

the truth—has Major Deverill been amusing himself by making a fool of *you* ? ”

It was impossible not to see, even by the garish light of the solitary candle, the furious rush of angry blood that dyed with indignant crimson the hitherto colourless cheeks of the offended girl.

“Madam, you insult me ! ” she exclaimed, in accents tremulous with passion held strong in curb. “Firstly, I *never* say what is false ; secondly, I allow no man to ‘amuse himself’ at my expense. Such humiliation would be only second—and scarcely that—to what I now feel in being compelled to submit to this catechising.”

And standing up, tall, dignified, and bitterly wroth, she walked hurriedly to the door.

“Come back ! ” cried Mrs. Blount’s voice from the bed. “It is not enough”—whimpering—“that you show me no compassion, when I am laid up here sick and in pain”—(whatever pain she might be enduring, her appetite, apparently, did not suffer)—“not enough that I have to bear your unfeeling conduct, but you must put on airs to upset me. It’s always the way with dependants ; nothing but ingratitude for all the kindness shown them. Come back, I say ! ”

“I shall not,” said Honor, with terrible calmness. “You are better alone ; as I shall be.”

“Don’t *attempt* to leave this room without my permission,” screamed Mrs. Blount, hoarse as a parrot from excitement and rage ; “come back this instant, and sit down ! ”

The scream rose to a commanding shriek as her words remained unheeded, and Honor grasped the door-handle with a firm hand.

“Do you set me at defiance ? ” yelled Mrs. Blount, hanging half-way out of bed, in a very un-Hellenic attitude. “Will you *come back* ? ”

“No ! ” said Honor, in a cast-iron tone.

But, even as she uttered the determined word, her eye caught the outline of a figure, seen dimly through the murky light, with warning hand uplifted, and, as she instinctively paused, a well-known voice said—

“Bless me, what a smell of blackbeetles ! I’d have a hedgehog up here if I were you, Step. Sankey wouldn’t eat *him*, I’ll warrant.”

Honor turned at once, and walked proudly back to the bedside. Her obedience was evidently sorely against the grain.

Her heaving bosom and disdainful carriage told the tale too plainly to the woman whose lynx eyes were bent upon her, as though to read, if it were possible, her very soul.

"Ha! you have thought better of it, have you?" exclaimed Mrs. Blount, panting out her words in angry scorn of the helpless girl over whom she held tyrannic rule. "A good thing it is for you too. That haughty spirit of yours will get plenty of breaking down before I've done with it."

Honor was dumb, standing statue-like beside the bed on which her tormentor lay.

"Do you hear me?" cried Mrs. Blount, determined to renew the attack. "Speak, if you do."

"Of course she hears you," said Bet, giving a tremendous yawn, and shaking herself like a dog; "but for gracious' sake, quit talking, and let Honor go to bed, or she'll cost you a fortune in face make-ups, and never get a man in the end. Let her go, I say."

Her stepmother swung round with a lurch.

"What brought *you* here?" she exclaimed. "You were not sent for."

"I know that," was the terse response.

"And what brought you, pray?"

"My feet," answered Bet, sniffing. "I didn't come on the tricycle, you may be sure, or trundled in a wheelbarrow, or seated in a bath-chair with a little donkey tackled to it, like Lady Kissie did at Brighton last year, for effect. I've come in to say, and I mean to say it before Honor, that, although I opened the library door for an instant this evening (not knowing that any one was there), I never said one word about it to you or to anybody else; so you got none of your information about your son's visit, or the length of it, or any other matter, from *me*. I just want her to know this."

"I never thought otherwise," said Honor, ingenuously. "You are about the last to be suspected of acting spy."

"Hold your tongue and sit down," exclaimed Mrs. Blount, angrily; and Honor obeyed with the docility of a child.

"I was about to speak to you for *your good*," went on the hostess, in that inexpressibly disagreeable and sourly patronizing tone which women who are prepared to give a disinterested lecture to one of their own sex always adopt, "for your own good, please to remember; and, if your friend Bet chooses to stop and listen, she is quite welcome to share the benefits of what I say" ("Thank you," muttered Bet, *sotto voce*.) "Well,

then, although you are so high and mighty, I repeat that, if *my son* is paying you any of his butterfly attentions, he is merely amusing himself. He is an extremely wild young man, and has very little respect for women. They have run after him too much, and spoilt him, and now he despises them all alike."

No statue carved in ebony or marble could have been more motionless than was Honor during the delivery of this speech; sitting where Mrs. Blount had placed her, with the searching glare from the remorseless candle falling full upon her schooled and passionless face.

"I daresay," went on the speaker, fidgeting among the pillows for her scent-bottle, "he has pretended to you to be a model of every virtue, a sort of incarnate saint! Most men do, I believe, when they have an object to effect."

"You are quite wrong, he has pretended nothing of the kind!" interrupted Honor, speaking boldly up in generous defence of the absent. "He can have no detractor more outspoken than himself."

"Oh, dear! How confidential you and he must have become?" said Mrs. Blount, sarcastically. "Pray, did he tell you *all* his peccadilloes? Confidence is nothing, you know, unless it be entire. Rather a novelty, certainly, for a young man to make a young woman his mother-confessor. I hope, my dear, that he omitted *nothing* when boxed up in the confessional, and that you listened attentively to the revelations, and gave complete absolution!"

The sneering tone carried gall and wormwood with it, and entered like an iron into the soul of the girl to whom the words were addressed: but she took no notice of it by word or sign.

"It is only right you should know, and that I should tell you," went on Mrs. Blount, "that he is not a man who is ever likely to marry. He is far too unsteady, and I believe, myself, too much entangled, in various ways and quarters, to think seriously of settling down: but, even if he did entertain any grave ideas upon the subject, it is scarcely probable that he would select *you*. He has—unless it is all squandered (I don't know)—his father's fortune, and his ancient name; you have nothing! Nothing! Remember that. It is quite incumbent on me to remind you of it, hearing—as I have done—that you and he spent the afternoon closeted together in the library."

"You didn't hear it from me, I repeat," interrupted Bet, resolutely. "It was Gewgaws told you. I met her meandering up and down the corridor, and guessed she was after no good."

"It doesn't matter in the least who told me," said her step-mother, coldly regarding her, as she stood looming dimly through the gloom which prevailed all over the large apartment, excepting just where the glare from the pitiless candle was made to fall full upon the stony face of the black-robed girl, who sat so terribly, so ominously still on the spot to which she had been compelled. "It is of no consequence who my informant was, and I will thank you to remain silent or leave the room, one or other."

"You said I might stay—for profit!" said Bet, sturdily, "and my profits are already so big that I can't find a bag to hold them!"

Mrs. Blount turned from her with a shrug, and fixed her eyes upon Honor.

"I must finish what I was saying to *you* about *my son*," she continued, laying, as before, particular stress upon the concluding words, "for I don't intend to speak again upon the subject, no matter how things may go or turn out. Well, then, he is a proud man, full of pride, and of conceit, too, for the world has spoilt him. His fancies with regard to women are as many as his cigarettes, last about as long, and are thrown aside as carelessly; but, whenever he *does* think of marrying and settling down after the profligate life he has led, it will be with some one who can trace back to the preceding generation, at any rate, which some of us here cannot do. Now I have warned you, and no matter how much you may be thrown together, or may choose to throw *yourselves* rather, I have done my duty. You must look after yourself from this out. No one else will be responsible for anything that may occur."

And, disposing her portly person in a more comfortable attitude, the dutiful invalid arranged her pillows to her satisfaction, and turned round upon her side.

"Can I go, please?" asked Honor, in a voice so small and frozen that Mrs. Blount lifted her head and gazed at her with an uneasy stare.

"Oh, yes, you can go if you choose!" she replied, "I am sure I don't require your company any longer. Bet, you stop here; I want you to bathe and bandage my foot, and to get me something hot to eat, and settle me for the night. I gave my maid leave to go out."

"Did you though," said Bet, laconically, "my! how odd she didn't go! I saw her at the door when Honor opened it just now; and I'll wager she's there still. I'll do the bathing, if you

like; plenty of hot water—real boiling—make you hop! but Gewgaws will manage the feeding; it's more in her line, and I've got Pa to physic and look after."

With stately steps, and black trailing skirts that swept like angry clouds about her as she walked, Honor passed from the room. For an instant she stood irresolute upon the landing, with aching eyeballs and wildly-beating heart. Then, rushing away to her chamber, she dashed herself upon the bed in an agony of outraged feeling. Tears burst from her eyes—the first she had shed since, when a child, her guardian, so loved and mourned, had found occasion to rebuke her for some trivial fault. It was not her way to weep. She was one of the few women whose eyes, even in bitterest sorrow, are always dry, and tell their tale of suffering by haggard hopeless misery, but never, or very rarely, by tears. As a woman, she had never wept; as a child seldom. All the grief which her great and terrible loss had entailed upon her, all the smothered anguish of the past few desolate weeks, all the choked-down sorrow of a heart bereft at one fell swoop of home, hope, happiness, everything which to the young makes life dear—together with the bitter humiliation of being compelled to listen to the degrading insinuations which, like fires of hell, scorched and burned themselves into her harrowed soul—all these things, and the bitterness of them, were in the tears which now flowed like molten lava from the eyes of the desolate and doubly-orphaned girl. Sobs, drawn seemingly from the inmost recesses of her being, came up from her stricken heart, and shook like a reed the couch upon which she rested. Then she fell upon her knees beside a chair, and clasping it with her hands, rested her face upon the hard seat in deadliest, keenest anguish.

Another figure came and knelt there also; another face, chill and tearless, was laid against her wet and burning one; other hands sought hers with caressing gesture, and confined them in a gentle clasp.

"Ay, cry on, cry on," said the voice of Bet, as Honor, with a fresh burst, flung herself upon that one compassionate breast. "Cry on, dear heart! just as long as you can. 'Twill do you good. It's the only thing that will. I know what it is; I was like you—*once*. God! how long ago! a lifetime it seems; and yet only a few short years. There, you're better now. Come and sit on this couch; I want to talk to you, and as well do it to-night as any other time. You have got your baptism of the waters of Marah, just as I got it! By-and-by you'll grow hardened, as I did, and won't mind."

"Oh, is there no escape from this?" cried Honor, with renewed tears, as thoughts of past happiness and present woe crowded thick upon her fancy. "Is there no way out of it—none—none?"

"Not just yet," answered her companion, quietly; "and so you had better just make up your mind. Do you think I haven't pitied you this last hour? Ay, have I not! But where was the help? If I hadn't signed to you to go back that time when you were leaving the room, she'd have kept it all in for you until to-morrow, and given it double to you then, when I wouldn't, perhaps, be in the way to watch over my poor lamb. It was better to have it over. She's done now; I know her. She won't say another word on the subject—not a single syllable, and she'll be as sweet as honey in the morning, as though she had forgotten all about it. By-and-by she'll invite him here, when she gets Pa away. Wait awhile and see."

"With what object?" asked Honor, in wistful wonderment; "why should——"

"Oh, I don't pretend to know," answered Bet, staring up at the sky, where the stars were shining; "she understands her own policy, I suppose. But one thing I say to you: if he is in earnest, or ever comes to be, take him, that's all. Don't be put off it by anything she may say, or have said. She has no more control over him, or any more right to have, than one of his own servants."

Honor looked quickly up from the shoulder on which her head was resting. The eyes of her companion were no longer fixed upon the stars; they were downcast. The girl's face looked white and weird in the moonlight; every feature was marked by a qualm of pain.

"You are ill!" exclaimed Honor, alarmed.

"Ill!" repeated Bet—"not I," forcing a laugh. "Do you hear what I say to you now? Don't refuse Derrick Deverill if he asks you. I don't believe he could be otherwise than in earnest with *you*."

"His mother gives him a different character," murmured Honor, her face hidden again upon the shoulder to which she clung.

"Oh, you mustn't mind all *she* says," said Bet, again staring; "I daresay he's not particularly different from other men, or a bit better, perhaps, than most; but I'll tell you what it is: he'll never trifle with *you*. If he pays you attention, believe in it. If he asks you to marry him, say 'Yes.' That's my advice."

"Why should you suppose that his attentions to me should be more serious than those that he has paid to others?" asked Honor, with a quaver which might be tears or agitation, and was probably both.

"Because," said Bet, solemnly, "*you know how to keep him at a distance.* When girls do that, they are never trifled with. You may thank your bringing up, or your own innate feeling; others have been less fortunate in both."

"My bringing up!—it is *all* I have to thank," said Honor, weeping afresh, as she remembered the kind judicious hand which had always led her in such safe paths, the words of gentle advice that had guided her, the lips that had taught, the finger that had pointed the way, the strong faithful arm that had been both shelter and support—gone, for ever gone, to come back no more! The thought was too much. In an agony of sorrow, greater even than that in which her companion had found her, she clung despairingly to the form of the girl beside her, and wept such tears as woman weeps perhaps but once in a lifetime—can scarcely weep twice, thank God for it!—else her heart must indeed break.

"I am so wretched!" she wailed, and in her tone there was somewhat that savoured of apology, for a heavy sigh had come up from the bosom on which she leaned; "is there *no* escape from all this misery?"

"Not at once, as I said before," answered Bet, caressing the sweet form so closely nestled against her breast. "You can marry, I daresay, after awhile—even putting Derrick out of the question—if you like to take one of *her* choosing; but better, in my opinion, be single all your days than that. Men who would make good, fitting husbands don't come to houses like this to look for wives. Spendthrifts and broken-down *roués* do. Now, give up sobbing, and listen to me; you *can* do so, and heed what I say too, if you like, for you have plenty of sense, though you've not had much experience. I was in hopes—do you hear me, Honor?—that there might not for very long have been occasion to open your eyes to things as they are here. That a time would come when it *should* be done I made no doubt, but I hoped it was yet far off. I thought, up to an hour ago, that you might have found matters out by degrees, but there is no use now in trying to put it off any longer. It will be kinder for me to tell you at once. You must, then, submit to Mrs. Blount, so long as her tyrannies are of a petty sort, not involving questions of life-long importance or of right and wrong. Remember, dear,

you have got to live here—for a certain time, at all events—and, if you don't want continual warfare, pocket your pride, and give in. I'll stand by you, and save you from all the rubs I can, and, if it comes to an open fight between you and her about any matter of really great importance to *you*, why, I'll take up the rusty old armour that I wore in my own battles, and put it on again, and go over to your side like a man. I will, on my honour! Now, don't hug me yet awhile, for I've lots of disagreeable things to say. Expect no kindness from Mrs. Blount; it's not in her nature; she can be very sweet and nice so long as there is a purpose to be served; after that a whole dairy of fresh milk wouldn't stand against her sourness. What's that you say?—she was kind to you at Nutley. Of course she was; she had a purpose then. She saw that you were young, and pretty, and fresh—in short, a capital bait. Her hooks had been drawn up empty a few times before that. She's no longer young herself, and she feels it, but she knows precisely what *will draw*. She means that you shall dress, and talk, and sing, and dance, and ride, according to her fancy; ay, and gamble, too, in time, to please the men who come here. It's no harm at all for you to know this, and it may be a safeguard, perhaps, when I'm not by to keep things straight; but there's no use—none at all, mind—in fighting against her. I have gone through the fire myself—known all about it long ago—and I am right. You'll have to give in.”

Honor hurriedly raised herself, with a remorseful exclamation.

“Forgive my selfishness,” she pleaded. “I never thought—you seemed so careless; and yet I might surely have known.”

They were only broken sentences which fell from her lips. Thought mastered speech. She paused, with looks of wistful sympathy upon her expressive face.

“So careless?” repeated Bet, with a smile of mingled bitterness and scorn; “ay, that is just what I am, careless—except for you, and others like you, who have been brought here as doves, and have grown into serpents, or worse. Careless, am I? No wonder. Better that than mad, one or other it should be. Look at me!” she cried, startled by some unaccustomed impulse into momentary passion, and springing petulantly to her feet; “I am not different from others, except as I have made myself so. I could be attractive if I chose—I used to be. I was young, and comely, and admired, and happy, too, until *she* came to blight me. She paraded my accomplishments and myself before men's eyes, and traded on them, and tried to barter me to the highest

bidder, until I loathed myself, and turned in disgust from what I saw was before me. To avoid it I took to dressing like a mummer, and acting like one very often, and I forgot all the fine things she was so fond of showing me off for—managed even to forget my grammar—and lost every particle of identity in the image which in place of myself I set up. She can't trade me off now; there's not a man from here to Kentish Town would walk the same side of the street with me if he could. I'm mad, they say, or a fool! Let them think it. She hates me for having done this, and I hate her for having driven me to it, and we both know one another's feeling, yet never have what's called 'a falling out.' She is my father's wife. That is enough."

Ay, there was where the secret lay. With something which sounded like a dry sob catching her breath, the girl sat down again, and burst into a laugh.

"It's all right," she said, seeing the startled look in Honor's shocked eyes; "I haven't frightened you, have I? Never mind: I'm not a bit mad, but society *is*, my dear! It's a farce, a comedy, more laughable than anything that's ever played on the stage. You are here in the midst of it. She will drag you to balls, and suppers, and routs, and card-parties, and she'll dress you, gorgeously, and teach you what *she* wants you to learn and to do—and paint you when you grow pale, and pad you when you grow thin. Oh, yes; she will, though. I know. And she'll send you, or take you, here and there, as a decoy duck, or a candle for the moths to burn their wings at; and then, when you've served your turn at that, you'll be tied up and labelled, like a bale of goods, for the matrimonial market. It's dreadful to hear, and worse to tell, but you *should* come to know it ere long, and she opened up the way to-night—all for the better, perhaps. You must grin and bear it, dearie, grin and bear it, unless God is good, and makes a way for you to escape. I believe, though, that He forgets to think about such places as this; and we, in turn, forget Him. That's just how it is."

"I shall strive, after a while," said Honor, weeping again, "to find some means of living by myself. I could teach pretty well, I fancy, or work, or go on the stage. I have a great taste for acting."

Bet laughed pittingly.

"My poor child! How little you know! But there; I won't dishearten you; time enough when the time *comes* to do that. Believe me, however, real poverty is very different from what you see it on the stage. Real labourers, for instance, don't work all

day in knee-breeches decked out with ribbons, silk stockings and diamond rings; cottage girls don't go a haymaking in muslin frocks and lace-trimmed aprons; real gentlemen don't take kindly to porridge and fat bacon, nor are they generally partial to the crystal spring—no more do they learn intuitively how to sow and reap, but are, on the contrary, a laughing-stock for the cow-boys and a standing butt for the oxen. No, no, my dear! Poverty is very pretty on the stage, but it is very nasty when you meet it face to face on the high road."

"Then there is nothing to be done but bear things as they are, and are likely to be!" moaned Honor, whose wet face looked awfully white and troubled in the moonlight. "What did she mean, do you think, by 'tracing back a generation'?"

Bet winced.

"I would rather not speak about that, dear," she answered, somewhat hurriedly. "It was a very coarse remark; and a most unnecessary one."

"But I should prefer your telling me. I really should."

Honor's voice was very low indeed.

"I will tell you, dearie, if you like," replied Bet, stooping down and kissing the soft hair which lay in confusion upon her shoulder, "but I would very much rather not. Well, if I must"—as Honor's eyes still pleaded—"I think she meant" (speaking very gently and tenderly) "that you could not tell your parentage."

"But my parents are dead!" said Honor, looking mystified, and taking the matter—to her companion's great relief—entirely differently from the manner in which she expected and feared it would be taken. "They are dead; I never knew them. They died when I was an infant."

"Yes, dear."

Bet's face was turned away.

"My guardian knew something of them—of one at least, my nurse said—and took me to live with him when they died, and gave me a home at Nutley. Such a happy one!"

"Yes, yes, dear! I know."

Her face was still averted.

"And my parents," went on Honor, with dreamy, humid eyes, "must have been in some way related to my darling whom I have lost, for my name is the same as his. Mr. Bright of Nutley! How well all the country people knew him—and *loved* him!"

Seeing that she was off on a train of sad reflection which

could only end in further demonstrations of sorrow, Bet wisely unclasped the clinging arms that were cast about her neck, and got up from the couch.

"I must go," she said, "and I am glad we have had this talk. Things here are bad enough, goodness knows; 'twould be absurd to deny that; but there might be worse places to make one's home in. Hundreds of girls would be quite satisfied and happy here, living in luxury, and with no end of gaiety and so-called 'amusement'; but I knew before ever I saw you, that you were different. You may manage, however, by a little tact (a quality before talent, any day) not to be quite miserable, and the first step towards it will be to avoid ruffling Mrs. Blount more than you can help; for, remember, you have to make your home with her, and she has a great deal in her power. Now, dearie, it is time that you were in bed; you will be better to-morrow for that big fit of tears, and you must get up with a cheerful heart, determined to face your difficulties, whatever they may be. Good night; my father is really ill, I fear, and I may have to sit up with him. Let me see you smile before I go. That's right—though it's a very drowned smile, I must confess. Keep bright now, Honor dear, like your name, you know. There really *are* worse houses than this, after all, and you can remember that there is one in it who will be always ready to stand your friend."

She kissed her young companion without any demonstrativeness—quietly, and with a sisterly regard—and went softly from the room.

With exquisite feeling and refinement she had avoided all mention of the scene that she had witnessed in the library, had made no reference to Deverill's visit, or its object, or the very smallest allusion to Mr. Jessel's name. How Honor thanked her was only known to her own grateful heart.

Another thing, too, had been particularly observable during that lengthened interview with Bet: the girl's marked avoidance of her father's name in connection with the household tyrannies. This was an instance of filial duty, beautiful as it was rare, which did not escape Honor; and when, with the simple faith which contact with the world's rude corners had not destroyed, she knelt and offered up her evening prayer in the pure light of the holy stars, she bore upon her burdened heart the friend who had won her esteem no less than her affection, by remembering to keep and reverence "the commandment that hath promise."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN the same room, at the same hour, with the same stars striving to shine in, but excluded by closely-drawn curtains, Honor stood a week or so later, with the garish gaslight glaring down upon the radiance of the ball attire in which she was clad. Her toilette was complete, save for a few finishing touches, and these Lady Kissie was adding with her own fair hands.

Floating clouds of softest white enveloped the light figure of the youthful débutante. Her arms were bare to the shoulders, her beautiful neck entirely uncovered—not even a shimmer of lace or network hiding the rise and fall of her virgin bosom. A band of pearls was around her swan-like throat, and a single white rose, natural and pure as the wearer of it, nestled amongst the abundant coils of her rippling hair. A flush was on her cheek, an unwonted light in her eyes; it might be modesty, excitement, or girlish pride—one, or all three combined; but, whatever it was, it lent an additional charm to the many with which Nature had endowed her, and supplied the only item which was lacking to make the picture perfect: one touch of bright colouring to complete the whole. She looked supremely beautiful, and Bet, seated in an easy-chair, with her elbow resting upon the arm of it and her chin buried in the palm of her hand, gazed at her protégée with a wistful, anxious look in those great, strange eyes of hers, which, despite their oddness, had an irresistible “draw” about them, as undeniable as it was unexplained. There was a palpable pain in her expression, as though something were coming which she feared and would fain avert.

That she herself was not going to the ball was to all appearance a certainty. She was dressed in an abbreviated skirt of flounced buff muslin, with paniers and bodice of olive green, profusely trimmed with red. She was nursing a tortoise, and had Sancho's head pillowed upon her slippered feet.

Lady Kissie was such a marvel of beauty, even in her pectioats, that to describe her would be impossible. Cream satin slippers were

on her dainty feet, gold-clocked stockings concealed her not-too-robust ankles. She wore the neatest little lace-trimmed underskirt in the world, a temporary wrap was laid about her shoulders, and a wreath of exquisite natural flowers encircled her bright hair. Her complexion was of marvellous brilliancy, her forehead of astounding whiteness, the fowling-pieces, too, were burnished and primed.

She had evidently taken considerable pains with Honor's toilette: to the neglect—*pro tem.* at all events—of the completion of her own; and, when her handiwork was finished, she stood back and surveyed it with great satisfaction.

"Yes, you will do now," she said, complacently; "I can't suggest any improvement, except that when that flush goes off your face you will be too white. However, as you *won't* allow me to rectify it, it can't be helped, of course."

"I shall do very well, thank you; indeed, if you will believe me, I am always white," said Honor, meekly, yet determined to show battle the moment the rouge-pot, round which Lady Kissie's fingers were ominously hovering, should be actually brought forward.

"You look very well, just now at all events," said the beauty, with a contemplative side-bend of her head; "you ought to achieve success to-night. Sir Tittleum will be charmed."

"Like an old snake!" said Bet, in a sepulchral voice from the chair. "Honor don't want to charm *him*, I'm sure."

Lady Kissie pretended not to hear. She always ignored Bet—was never, in fact, conscious of her presence, except when assailed herself in some vulnerable quarter by a dry remark or odd sarcastic allusion from the girl's lips. Then she was sufficiently awake to the disagreeable reality.

"You must remember," she said, still addressing herself to Honor, as though no interruption had taken place, "that I expect you to bear in mind all the instructions I have been giving you, because I can't keep reminding you of them when we are in that rattling brougham, with all the windows up. As this is your first London ball, I must look after you a bit. Keep close to me when we go in; I always stand near the doorway, as much as possible in everybody's way—the host is then bound to get me a partner at once, even if I am not acquainted with any of the dancing men present. It is a good thing to do in church, too. I always try it—when I go; and the pew-opener provides me with a seat forthwith, if only to get me out of the way."

"Master Dawkins, *alias* 'The Artful Dodger,' was nothing at all to you," said Bet, in the same unearthly tone in which she had before spoken. "Who in the world had the educating of you, I wonder?"

Her ladyship, who was contemplating the effect of a flower pinned upon Honor's left shoulder, again affected not to hear.

"Don't forget, too," she went on, "that, whenever you are in a crowd, it looks well to bow slightly in different directions, as though you were recognized by, and were saluting, friends. It looks as if you knew a lot of the people present, and, if there is a sufficient number to make a throng in the rooms, nobody can trace to whom you are bowing. It has an excellent effect, I can assure you."

"It has," muttered Bet, gloomily, "especially if the man who's announcing the guests takes it to himself, and presumes on it later on!"

"Of course you won't forget," continued Lady Kissie, pursuing her instructions in entire disregard of the presence of a third party, "that you must not on any account—not on *any* account, remember—dance with a boy, or attempt to waltz with a man who can't reverse. Sir Tittleum is a perfect waltzer, when he chooses to go in for it."

"And when his partner lets him catch his wind, like an old horse!" put in Bet, *sotto voce*. "If you gallop him too long, he'll get blown—or burst, perhaps! who knows?"

Lady Kissie was, during most of this time, endeavouring, with Honor's assistance, to get herself into her own ball-dress: a task involving no little difficulty, as it was so wonderfully made and fashioned, that nobody could at first understand how to put it on at all. When it was at length adjusted, or at least over her ladyship's head, the bodice refused to fasten, being only nineteen inches around the waist, and the perplexed beauty had to hold it at the sides, and draw in her breath, while Honor tugged and strained to make the button-holes meet the buttons across the ominous gap which intervened between.

"I cannot do it!" she said, hopelessly; and paused, with flushed face, and hot and tired fingers, only too willing to relinquish the uncongenial task. "I really cannot!"

"Oh, dear me, how absurd! Why, it is not a bit tight in the world," gasped her ladyship, blue from compression, but not in any way daunted. "Get the button-hook—surely you have one, and you will do it quite easily."

But, this in turn proving ineffectual, Bet came to the rescue with—

“Let me try, Honor; you’re no good. I have fine, strong hands.”

“Yes, and fine black ones, too; grubbing with those filthy animals all day!” screamed Lady Kissie, warding her off with a hair-brush. “Get away, and don’t come near me! Oh, dear, how I miss that invaluable woman, Rybbonds! There is nothing she can’t do; but, of course, Mrs. Blount could not get along without her at Buxton. Quite impossible.”

“Quite!” muttered Bet, with gravity, “she’d never get her own dresses to meet, if she left her behind. Look here, miladi; you’ll have to take an extra pull at your stays, or else leave that gown unfastened, and wear a shawl all night.”

“I believe you are right, for once in your life,” muttered her ladyship, sulkily. And, removing the obstinate bodice, she tightened herself another inch, and then, with much gasping, got herself triumphantly buttoned up, with as much whalebone about her as would have set up a mantua-maker’s mart.

“I believe we are ready at last,” she said, arranging her cloak very gingerly, for fear anything important should give way. “I wonder, now, what else I have to say to you before we go downstairs. Oh, yes! you will, of course, remember not to eat ices, they’ll make your nose red—and not to attempt to go near the supper-room. Such places are not a whit better than bear-gardens: everybody pushes and tramps, and you have to stand waiting for a seat, or even for standing room, at a table, with some fat old cormorant cramming herself like a stuffed bolster in front of you. It is degrading in the extreme.”

“Do as I once saw the Step do in India,” cried Bet, in a high key, and shaking all over with sudden laughter. “Get behind a cripple and rest your plate on his hump. Try it—it’s a capital plan. The Step made a most comfortable supper, and the hunchback didn’t dare to stir for fear of getting a slab of cold salmon down his back. I almost died with laughing for a week after. Look out, miladi, and mind that grand train of yours, or some one will tumble over it and leave wreckage behind—as you do yourself when there’s cold duck in question.” And, pretending to stumble, she dropped the tortoise among Lady Kissie’s elaborate draperies, and drove that aggrieved young matron to the verge of insanity by affecting not to be able to find out the precise spot upon which it had fallen, and groping amongst her flounces in pretended efforts to dislodge it.

As the two ladies arranged themselves in the carriage, the chaperone said :

"That was a good move of mine, was it not, proposing at dinner that the colonel should go on beforehand, as Sir Tittleum had promised me to have a card-room. If I had not done that, my dear, he would have been coming with us now, and not a respectable garment would either of us have had left upon our bodies. The manner in which that man contrives to spread-eagle himself over the whole carriage is absolutely astounding, twisting and turning and elbowing about, and yet grumbling for want of space. Selfish old pig! I'm sure I often pity his sweet wife. Now please, dear, will you just take charge of my fan, and handkerchief, and bouquet, there's an angel! they tire me so! and holding them puts one's gloves out of shape, too."

During the drive to the scene of the forthcoming festivities, Honor sat back in the carriage, her head resting against the cushions (until screamed at by Lady Kissie not to ruffle her hair), and her mind full of reflections, which even her vicinity to that restless lady could not altogether disturb. And here a brief retrospect will be necessary.

Bet had spoken truly when, on that memorable night of bitter anguish and awakening—then a week or more gone by—she had told her terror-stricken associate that Mrs. Blount would appear next morning as though nothing of unusual moment had occurred. Her words came veritably true, and Honor, acting strictly on her friend's advice, met her crotchety hostess in the same spirit as was outwardly evinced towards herself, and made no reference by word or sign to the preceding night's adventure. That she remembered and brooded over it, with, if possible, increasing bitterness, was known only to one whose watchful eyes were ever faithfully upon her, but not a syllable in allusion to it was spoken by any of those who had been at all concerned in the matter.

Mrs. Blount kept her bed for four days, on the third of which Derrick came again, and had an interview with his mother, entirely alone, Honor not appearing, although inquired for both on the coming and departure of the visitor. The sprained ankle not showing any very rapid signs of recovery, Mrs. Blount departed on the fifth day, with her maid in attendance upon her, for Buxton, to enjoy the benefits derivable from a fortnight's change of air, combined with the imbibing of curious waters. She took leave of Honor quite cordially, and, in apparently happy forget-

fulness that there had ever existed any cloud between them, gave the girl her enamelled cheek to kiss, and bade her accept Lady Kissie's example as a pattern and guide in all things. Colonel Blount—ever complaining, yet to all appearance rarely really ill—stormed and snapped from day to day at everybody around him, and exercised his selfish prerogative with the same untiring monotony, seldom troubling himself to speak to his young guest or to show her the smallest polite attention, and waited upon continually by Bet, with the untiring devotion which it seemed the business of her life to bestow upon him.

Honor had two more riding-lessons during that week of "learning," and then her new habit came home, and she went for a ride in the park with Lady Kissie and Sir Tittleum Tibbs, the former of whom—very much tightened and coloured, but exquisitely mounted and turned out—contrived conveniently to meet some friends whom she wished to join for a quiet canter, and left Honor in sole charge of their escort, who took decided pains to improve his advantage, and was so excessively devoted and suave that he quite forgot his haughty carriage, and comported himself much as other men were doing—only a trifle more tenderly, perhaps.

The singing lessons, under the influence of the great signor, were a terrible punishment, and a sore trial of voice; but they, in conjunction with other unpleasantnesses, were endured with a hardihood which Honor—like a young Stoic—determined to bring to bear upon all the difficulties that might chance to lie in her path. To take up her daily cross; this was her lesson,—not learned religiously, it is to be feared, nor with the gentle submission which comes of and is nurtured by deference to the will and ruling of the great Director of events, but with a stolid resolution to face evil and *fight against* it, in place of supplicating that its influences might be spared her. It was the front which a soldier brings to battle, rather than that with which a saint wards off the enemy's shafts. Putting on "the whole armour" might and would, she felt, be effectual against such things as the sword of the spirit was meant to fight, but, for the battlefield on which such foes as hers were ranged, there was but one fitting defence, the example of the mailed Mischrock, who, never conquered, was conqueror to the end.

Honor's happiest hours were those spent in the society of Bet, the girl whom she had at first so feared, and so very little understood. The two friends were continually together, and grew

daily more attached. When alone with Honor, Bet entirely cast aside her odd ways, and was a gentle, cheery, most pleasant companion, striving to shield the new-comer from even the faintest touch of pain, and evincing a firmness of mind and character, as well as perfect uprightness of purpose and steady determination on the side of right, for which none save the girl, who had gradually grown to know her, could possibly have given her credit. The amount of tact, too, which on all occasions she displayed might have been justly termed a gift. Many a stray shaft was turned aside by her unerring hand, many a thorn crushed to earth by her courageous foot, ere it had power or time to wound. Even the most rugged path could not have failed to become in a measure smoothed by her application of that marvellous *tact*, which truly, for all practical purposes of life, carries its own against talent in the proportion of twenty to one. To all outward seeming she was, when in ordinary company, a half-witted, eccentric nonentity, clad in bizarre costumes, and only one door removed from a fool; in the society of those for whom she cared, she was an indefatigable ministrant and peacemaker, yet as unreadable as a sealed book; with Honor, when alone, she was a tender, truthful, large-hearted being, whose noble nature rose from amid the ruins of her surroundings, like a flower amongst tombs. There was no demonstrativeness about Bet, none of that clinging softness and impulsive (seemingly purposeless) fondness which is the characteristic of so many women, and which, being unstable, is as unreliable as it is unwise. She clung to her new friend, not as the winding tendrils of a plant cling lovingly about the support on which they rely for succour, but as the sturdy oak flings out a protecting branch and shelters the wayside flower beneath it. An admirable interpreter of character, and admirer of what is ingenuous and true, she found in Honor much both to reverence and love. In her she beheld her ideal of what a woman yet in her fresh girlhood ought to be. Quick in feeling, though regulated in temper; beautiful and pure as an enthusiast's dream of heaven, yet bearing within her the latent and powerful passion and tenderness of earth. Honor had indeed much of what is termed genius, its warmth of emotion, its vividness of conception, its admiration for the grand, its affection for the good, and that contempt for whatever is mean and worthless, the very indulgence of which is an offence against the habits of the world. Her tastes were, however, too feminine and chaste ever to render her eccentric: they were calculated to conceal rather than to

publish the deeper recesses of her nature, and it was beneath a polished surface of manner, common to those with whom she had been accustomed to mix, that she hid the treasures of a mine which no human eye had ever yet explored.

It had not been without serious misgivings that Bet had consented to remain inactive, whilst her stepmother and Lady Kissie had arranged and carried out their programme for her young friend's first introduction to the gaieties of London life. She knew—who better?—how repugnant it was to the girl's feelings to be compelled to enter into scenes and places against which heart and inclination alike revolted; but, with a policy as wise as rare, she had remained silent, and had contented herself with giving Honor, when they were alone together, such sound advice and counsel as she hoped would be able to counteract, in a measure at least, the worldly teachings of the woman to whose chaperonage she was unwillingly obliged to (temporarily) relinquish her young charge. And this brings us again to the point of the narrative at which mention of other matters crept in.

“Thank goodness, we have arrived at last!” exclaimed Lady Kissie, letting down the carriage window (as the vehicle drew up with a noisy clatter) and peering out into the clear, starlit air. “Now, pray, take care of my bouquet as we go in, and don't knock it against anything—and mind my fan, please. I will take them from you at the drawing-room door.”

She did so, and they entered upon an extremely brilliant scene. Two immense rooms, fully illuminated by a blaze of waxen candles, softened down with crimson shades, and crowded by a gay company of dancers who moved to the music of an admirable band. The flash of diamonds was bewildering, the buzz of conversation everywhere audible, the throng about the doorway uncomfortably great.

Sir Tittleum Tibbs, looking very well in his character of host, and assisted by a cold, haughty-looking woman in stone-grey satin—a viscountess, who had lately espoused her third husband, and had consented on pressure to act as hostess for the occasion—met his guests on arrival and looked helplessly about for seats with which to accommodate them. Not being able to find any, they stood and talked.

Lady Kissie followed out her tactics to the letter. She remained near the doorway in a conspicuous position, playfully refusing all offers to dance, and coining imaginary engagements,

until a favoured suitor presented himself; then she accepted, and was whirled away among the crowd.

"Do you valse?" asked the host of Honor, when he had stood conversing with her for some considerable time; "yes! then may I have the pleasure? I believe I ought not to dance to-night, having so many friends to look after, but the temptation is not to be resisted."

His arm next instant was about her waist, and she was revolving with him amid the dancers, the envy of many, the admiration of all, save a few among the ranks of her own jealous sex.

It was impossible not to enjoy the motion, the unwonted delights of which were enhanced by a most perfect partner, an admirable floor, and the very best music that London could supply; and Honor did enjoy it thoroughly, forgetting for awhile her griefs and aversions, and abandoning herself, girl-like, to the passing pleasure of the hour. Then they rested for awhile, and as he stood, a little forgetful of his customary frigidity, and a good deal unbent in the society of one for whom he cherished a more than passing regard, Honor almost wondered why she shrank from his attentions as she undoubtedly did.

There was nothing actually disagreeable about him: rather the reverse, when he strove—as he was now striving—to please; and yet Derrick, with all his acknowledged faults and little sorely-felt offences upon his head, was dearer a thousand-fold, even to her fancy, than was the man who stood by her side, the apparent embodiment of all that was chivalrous, devoted, and good. Perhaps it was his very equality which kept love, or even feeling for him, at bay. It—the said equality—was his great fault, or rather failing. One longed, whilst analysing him, to find a hill, though it were to climb, or a stone, though it were in the way.

Neither in person nor character was he much above or beneath the ordinary standard of men. He was one of Nature's macadamised achievements: a smooth surface, without a ripple or a mark; whereas love ever attaches itself to something prominent, even though that something be what others may hate. One can scarcely feel extremes for mediocrity.

He looked into her face as they stood together; not with the warmth of passion, rather with a calculating curiosity to ascertain with a yet deeper knowledge the mysteries of a nature

which, to him in an especial manner, remained as yet unrevealed.

"Your waltzing is on a par with the other accomplishments which I am told you possess, Miss Bright," he observed, as he led her away to the enjoyment of a cooler atmosphere; and, requesting to see her card, he wrote his name upon it on four different lines. She did not dare to remonstrate. The probabilities of what partners she might chance to get, or ought of right to select from, was about the only subject on which Bet, in her hurried instructions, had omitted to touch. Therefore she said nothing.

In the refreshment room a man came behind the host, and whispered something which Honor overheard.

"Introduce me," he said, hurriedly; and Sir Tittleum did so.

He was an Irishman—a major of marines—with a bad accent, a bad carriage, and a remarkably good face. He was burly and blunt, and outspoken to the last degree; always said whatever was in his mind—complimentary or otherwise—and although a passionate admirer of beauty (when not assisted by art), was desperately hard upon it when it was so, and rarely, as a rule, affected the society of ladies—even those least suspected of what he termed, when amongst men, "painting God's handiwork with the devil's brush."

Immediately on his introduction, he informed his newly-made acquaintance that he was "no great hand" at anything except a quiet quadrille; and, as the dancers were just then forming up for one, they took their places, the major's good-humoured eye roving over the heads of the company, while his hand, with a freedom engendered of long acquaintance with the host, directed the uncertain movements of vacillating couples, such as are to be found in every ball-room, forgetting that they want to join until the music has begun, and then wandering up—sometimes listlessly, but more frequently in hot haste—to place themselves directly in front of others who have already secured the situation and are about to begin the dance.

Presently his eye fell upon Lady Kissie—all smiles, sprightliness, pleasantry, and perfume, leaning upon the arm of a young peer, against whose armour, if indeed he wore any, shots from the fowling-pieces were raining dangerously fast.

"By Jove! what a pretty woman!" exclaimed the major, evidently lost in admiration, as was customary with most persons

on first beholding the charms of the engaging beauty, "and not made up, either! or deuced well done if she is. Do you know her name?"

Honor told him, and he fell back in surprise. So amazed was he, in fact, that he entirely forgot the first figure of the lancers, and with unwonted want of gallantry left his *vis-à-vis* advancing and holding out her hand to him, in helpless wonderment, for fully half a minute, before he suddenly recollected himself and her, and swung her round with such tremendous energy that she almost failed in preserving her equilibrium, and gave him an angry glance which would have withered anyone less robust than a sturdy Hibernian.

"You don't really mean to say that *that's* Lady Kissie?" he said to Honor, when they had completed the ceremony of "setting to" and turning their corner neighbours, and were released for a while from active service through the taking up of it by the side couples. "How very strange!" and he looked hard at the graceful Vine, as she stood poised upon her diminutive toes, surveying the company through her *pince-nez*, and flirting with her fan.

"It's awfully queer!" he went on, still with his eyes in the same direction, and smiling a little grimly, as though some odd thoughts were running in his head. "A widow, I believe; is she not?"

Honor, who took but little interest in the conversation, and who would have preferred the discussion of almost any other topic, answered abstractedly that she believed she was.

"Ah! I thought so," said the major, frowning slightly, and shaking his rough head; "I had no doubt it was the same. Well—*women are strange!* There she is, full of fun and gaiety—and it was only this morning—ay, indeed—that I assisted at the funeral of a man she killed!"

CHAPTER XXIV

"SHE *killed*!" repeated Honor, startled into attention by the solemnity of his words, although the tone in which they were uttered was not solemn at all; rather jocular, indeed, than otherwise, as though there were an undercurrent of something amusing in the dreary matter in hand. This might, however, have been put on to hide a deeper feeling, which men are, as a rule, ashamed to show.

"Yes; killed! just so. That is what I said."

He actually began to whistle the tune which the band was playing, but, remembering the vicinity of a lady, stopped in time and blew his nose tremendously hard.

"You cannot mean it!" said Honor, speaking calmly, yet regarding him with an awed look in her great solemn eyes.

"Ay, but I do. She fooled him, broke his heart, and he put a bullet through it, a day or two ago, with his own hand. La! that's nothing. There's much worse happening every day in half the private gaming-houses in London: not to speak of the ugly things one hears of from abroad. The only part of it that's odd to *me* is, my chancing to meet her here to-night."

"Does she know it?" asked Honor, in a low, shocked tone; "she may not have heard."

"Oh, yes; she has. A man of his regiment sent, or brought her, his last message—together with something, I think, which he wished to have given her. I didn't chance to hear many of the particulars. She's a very pretty woman: that's one thing; and, if not painted, *worth* dying for. What's life, after all? Just as well go one way as another."

They finished the dance in silence, and then sat down. Numerous gay and smiling couples passed and repassed their resting-place: and among them, Lady Kissie, in animated conversation with the host, on whose arm she leaned. The major gazed curiously at her from beneath his shaggy brows.

"I fancy there *is* some 'making up' there, after all," he

observed, smiling grimly as before, and closely regarding the beauty as she frisked past; "not much heart either, I am afraid. What do you say of your sex, Miss Bright?"

"That I fancy we are very often wronged," Honor answered, calmly. "Lady Kissie may not have had anything to do with the event you have named. It would be hard, indeed, if, for every rash act which young men commit, some woman were to be blamed."

Her companion shook his head, with a little incredulous laugh.

"They are usually at the bottom of all such things," he said, carelessly; "but, no matter, let it pass. Poor young Crawshay! a fool, no doubt, but a lot of us are very sorry for him. Do you know that man with a star on his breast—here, a little to our left? No? Well, he is a very remarkable man; General George. 'Goldy George' he is called, owing to a stroke of luck that befell him a few years ago. You may remember, or perhaps you don't, that, when Peking was sacked, the French troops were a day in advance of ours, and of course left very little worth carrying away. At that time George was a major in one of the Sikh regiments which had gone to war against the Celestials. Look well at him, now; he is a remarkable man, and he managed a stroke of policy which gained for him his *sabre-quet*. Long before the British troops were allowed to enter the Summer Palace, George slipped off with three or four of the *Kalsa*, to secure what he could of the remaining loot, and, after appropriating a few inconsiderable trifles, he spied some gods of metal which looked like brass or copper. He lifted one of them, and, from the weight of it, knew it to be gold, so he quietly put a couple (worth a ransom, my dear young lady) on the shoulders of two of the followers of the prophet Naunk, and positively purloined them! Nobody, of course, suspected the iconoclast, or he would have had a bayonet put through his body in no time by some of the other looters. Dear me," went on the major, fancying perhaps from Honor's silence that she was interested in his discourse, "what strange types of society one meets with at a gathering like this to-night. I'll tell you who was with George on that occasion, and on another at Delhi, and who shared a tremendous lot of loot both times: Major Richard Blount; 'Colonel,' they call him, by courtesy. He's behind that arras now, in the card-room, losing money to any amount. A queer card he, I can tell you. I knew him well in India. He married——"

"I know him *now*," said Honor, breathing fast, and interrupting him ere he could proceed further; "I am under his charge to-night—he will take me home. I live with him. Please know that he is my—my guardian. I have no other—none!"

She caught her breath quickly as she concluded, and lay wearily back among the cushions piled luxuriously upon the couch. The major grew very red, even his fat neck blushed in sympathy with the port-wine hue which overspread his astonished features.

"Oh!—ah!—really! I am delighted to hear it," he stammered out; "enchanted, I assure you. Permit me to get you an ice."

An hour later Honor was sitting alone, though in the midst of a crowd. She was enjoying her first moment of solitude: in other words, immunity from speech. The host had just left her, after a long spell—*very* long it seemed—of close attendance upon her, and devotion sufficiently undisguised to form a topic for general remark. She was weary of his formal attentions, and glad to be released from them, even for awhile. Her eyes—tired of the constant movement of gay colours, the glitter of gems and orders, the flitting of feet through the ceaseless dance—were cast downwards; her figure rested against the high-backed chair on which she sat; her hands were toying idly with the pompons scattered upon her skirt; her thoughts were on what she had heard respecting young Crawshay's fate. She had scarcely learned to know him, even by sight, yet in her heart there was regret for him. If such tragedies meant (as had been said) 'nothing,' and were as general as had been averred, society and its surroundings were even less desirable than she had hitherto thought or believed.

Presently a hand touched her shoulder, and, glancing upwards in surprise, her eyes met those of Colonel Blount, bent upon her with a steady gaze. His usually cadaverous face had an unwonted flush upon it, drops of sweat stood upon his forehead, his eyeballs glowed with a fitful, feverish light.

Believing that he had come to fetch her home, Honor rose at once with ready alacrity; but he hastened to undeceive her.

"I do not want in the least to take you away," he said, quite suavely. "On the contrary, I was hoping that you were not feeling tired, for I have no particular wish to go at present, and Lady Kissie has been obliged to leave—felt unwell, or some-

thing or another. At any rate, she is gone, having commissioned me to look well after you, and not allow you to feel dull. Suppose we take a turn through the rooms—you and I? Do, it will amuse you!"

His manner was kind and courteous, beyond what (even at Nutley) she had ever known it, and with a quick feeling of gratitude for an attention which she regarded as a wish upon his part to compensate for past unpleasantnesses, and a desire to make the night less wearisome to her than it must otherwise be, she acquiesced at once, and walked about, leaning upon his arm. Quite an agreeable half-hour passed by, listening to his dissertations on persons and things surrounding them, and watching the numerous couples—some so ill-assorted—who kept continually passing through the curtained doorway, near which they finally came to a stand.

Colonel Blount was, according to his daily showing, the last man in the world to care to play "Squire of dames" to a member of the fair sex, no matter how engrossing might be her charms. He cared nothing for civilities; the receiving of them bored him, the bestowal of such had seemed hitherto entirely outside his ken. He had gathered about himself, link by link, the chains which in earlier life had connected him with the world. In his own thoughts he had found that variety and occupation which others experience in their intercourse with their fellow-men. Like the Chinese, he made his map of the universe consist of a circle within a square, the circle being his own empire of thought and *self*; while to the scanty corners which were left without he banished all that appertained to the remainder of mankind.

Knowing that his disposition was such, and having rarely seen him unbend from it, Honor noticed with pleasure the temporary change. He smiled; he talked; ascetic though he was, he even laughed now and again, when relating to her some lively anecdote, or drawing her attention to the peculiarities of some who passed by.

Presently they strolled towards an extemporised verandah, from whence an agreeable current of cool but chill air was stealing in. Colonel Blount snatched a mantle which lay upon a couch near by, and, regardless to whom it might belong, drew it gently about his charge's shoulders.

"You must not get cold," he said, "and yet the breeze here is refreshing. Are you engaged for many more dances?"

She glanced at her card, and held it to him to look at. "Only two," she answered; "and I do not care about them."

"Both reserved for the host"—with a little meaning smile—"and one of them must be going on now. He will be looking for you."

"Please do not mind," pleaded Honor, entreatingly; "I much prefer not dancing. I do, indeed."

He looked at her, smiling incredulously.

"Are you quite serious in saying so?"

"Entirely, I assure you. It is not my way to jest."

"Very well," he said; "we will sit and talk. The quietude here is tempting."

They sat down—not a soul near, except now and again a busy servant hurrying to or from some important duty, with an equally important face. The music of a sparkling valse, played at a distance, sounded pleasantly, because not too near; the murmur of voices came mellowed and subdued upon the flower-laden air.

Honor had been earnestly wishing an opportunity to ask a question, but the pressure of guests had forbidden it. Now they were alone.

"Do you know that Mr. Crawshay is dead?" she inquired, giving expression at once to what was in her thoughts.

"God bless my soul! you frighten me!" exclaimed her companion, staring at her with startled eyes. "What a subject for a ball-room! Who on earth has been talking to you of such things as these?"

"It does not matter who"—her face and tone were perfectly calm—"have you heard it?"

"Yes; I knew it on Wednesday; but, for gracious' sake, leave such ugly subjects alone. The boy was mad; half these youngsters are: but we don't speak about them, or of their doings; don't mind them, in fact; certainly not."

"Is it true that Lady Kissie had anything to do with it? I want to know."

"Well, you know already that he was very much devoted to her; but pretty women of her age don't care to marry boys, although they may flirt with them."

"Then it was her flirting which cost him his life?"

"I do not say so at all. Such a manner of putting it would not be fair. I saw him two days before the event—was sent for, indeed. He was then drinking heavily—had some jealous

fit on him about a man *you* know (a very worthless fellow, by the way), my stepson—Major Deverill. It seems that he—young Crawshay, I mean—took up some suspicion, he told me so, from a conversation he had with her at the Continental the very evening she introduced him at our house: at least, so I believe. I was at Nutley at the time, so did not meet him until I arrived at home with you.”

“Well?” Honor’s eyes queried as eloquently as her tongue.

“Well, one thing led to another, I suppose. It appears she made an appointment for him to visit her one day last week; she put him off in the end, under some excuse—didn’t want his company, I fancy—and he managed to find out, unfortunately, that she was lunching with Deverill somewhere or another in town. He followed her to Grosvenor Place the same evening, as you will no doubt remember—called on her next day, they had a quarrel, and he blew out his brains (the little he possessed, poor chap!) immediately after. Pooh! don’t shiver; it’s nothing at all—a mere featherweight in the scale of events, and a *decided* feather in the cap of a pretty and fashionable woman. But here comes our host, seeking you for that second dance you have promised him. *Voilà!* I resign.”

The remainder of the evening was a species of purgatorial punishment such as Honor had never before endured. Handed over from one stranger to another, yet ever pursued by the attentions of the man to whom, despite her obligations, she would fain have bidden a hurried adieu and gone away homewards—she longed with indescribable anxiety for the moment of release, and looked anxiously about for Colonel Blount, as the hours waned and the company began gradually to depart.

At length he came—ghostly pale in the dawning daylight, which was forcing its way through every aperture of the blinded windows—and Honor eagerly took the arm he offered her, and pressed nearer the door.

“We are not going just *yet*,” he said, carelessly; “let these people out first. There won’t be a clear coast for half an hour or more. Suppose we go to the card-room and look on at the play. It will divert you better than waiting here, and Tibbs has promised to take a turn at baccarat when they are all gone. Do you know the game?”

“No, not at all.” The answer came very listlessly, and the small white face grew still more pinched and pallid as the prospect of returning home became less and less distinct.

"Well, I will tell you something of it, and then you will be interested. In the first place, six packs are used for a baccarat bank, and before play begins the banker has to shuffle them all, and then to give one card to the right, and one to the left, and a third to himself, repeating the operation as he goes on. Court cards and tens count as zero, and if in his two cards he can get, say, nine——"

"I really am entirely unable to follow you, nor can I in the least understand one bit about it," said Honor, gently interrupting him; "but if you *want* me to look on, I am of course ready to do so."

"I want you to *play*—on a very small scale," he whispered, stooping down as they walked, and gazing intently into her face. "You will not have much to do, only this: I will be banker—when *you* see a three facing the players (now listen, and mark), and I move it to the top of the pack, watch until you see a six appear, and then take off your right glove."

"To handle the cards ungloved, you mean?" said Honor, inquiringly.

"No, my dear. I shall not ask you to touch them at all to-night. Everything must have a beginning, and I have said your play shall be on a small scale. Therefore I am not asking you to do much."

"No; but why remove my glove?"

"Well, I will explain. Do you know whist?"

"Not in the least."

"Nothing of cards at all?"

"I might truthfully answer 'No.'"

"Because I was about to say that when playing whist your partner gains the necessary cue to your hand by the suits you lead; in other words, by signs. Do you understand?"

"No. I am dull to-night; but let my ignorance pass."

He smiled, apparently not at all displeased, and drew her hand closer within his arm.

"It would take me too long to go into the matter now," he said, with light carelessness; "what I have been speaking of in connection with baccarat differs, of course, from whist, but the principle is the same. You gather from a code of signals what you are to do."

"Who gathers?" asked Honor, looking quickly up—"you, or I, or everybody?"

He threw her a rapid glance of furtive mistrust.

"You are not jesting with me?" he said, suspiciously. "You are really as ignorant—as little learned in the art of card-playing as you pretend—or perhaps, I should say, as you *appear* to be."

Despite her depression and weariness, the girl laughed quietly at the question. She had no suspicions, and, being indeed utterly ignorant with regard to gambling, was amused to think that he could *possibly* have any doubts about her being so.

"I know the names of the cards, and that is about all," she candidly avowed.

He looked relieved, and affected to laugh.

"You asked me such an extraordinary question," he said, half apologetically. "It was like a child who puzzles his elders with queries which, in their very ignorance, display something of a deeper knowledge than older persons possess. When I spoke about gathering a clue to action by a set code of signals I was thinking of myself. You will be my partner, so to speak—an inactive one, so far as actual card-playing is concerned, but I shall want my signals all the same."

"What are they, as a rule? I mean what will you require? Am I to speak to you at all?"

"No; *no*, decidedly not. You are not to attempt to speak. Do not open your mouth. You can play much better without.

"But I may make mistakes. I do not understand. Can you not excuse me? I am so—so—tired."

"Nonsense! you are not a bit; you only fancy it. Now listen. You are clever, and can play well if you like. Remember, then, that it will be my object—yours and mine, I mean—to get nine as often as we can; therefore, if you see me move, for example, a four to the top of the packs, watch for a five, and the instant it appears let me know it is there by removing your *left-hand* glove. But, recollect, you must not look at me at all, or pay any *noticeable* attention to the cards. You can be observant without attracting observation. *All* good players are so."

"You do not mean that this play is to be for money?" asked Honor in a shrinking tone. "In such a case I should really object very much."

"My dear child, don't be absurd. We only want to amuse ourselves for half an hour before going home. There will be no question of money involved in the matter at all."

"I am satisfied," said Honor, quietly. "Since it is your wish that I should play, I shall offer no further opposition; but I cannot help regretting that you should have selected me for your partner. I know so little."

"Perhaps that is the reason, of all others, that I have selected you in preference to anybody else," he said, smilingly. "It is not pleasant, you know, in profession, trade, or business, that a man's partner should be as learned as himself. With play it is just the same. You have only to do as *I tell you*."

And, lowering his voice, he spoke to her with concealed earnestness for a moment or two, and then—having procured her a seat in one of the fast-emptying *salons*—disappeared through a closed doorway, leaving her to the companionship of a cadaverous old lady, with a bunch of sickly feathers in her cap, to match her complexion, and a virgin in yellow gauze, with an eruption of red roses all over it, a huge coral-necklace, and a wreath of palms, surmounting a most discontented countenance: as though she had been recently led to victory, and had come back somewhat disappointed with the proceeding. As these two occupied themselves, whilst waiting for their carriage, with discussing the entertainment and the company in general in tones sufficiently audible to be overheard, Honor gained a goodly insight into men and manners, and enjoyed the privilege of having her eyes pretty widely opened to the shortcomings and iniquities of her own sex.

It was a relief to her when the talkers dispersed, and she was left altogether alone. The deserted rooms, lately so gaily occupied, looked chill and bare. The wax lights had burnt low; some were altogether extinguished. The musicians' seats were empty; the floor was strewn with fragments of finery, flowers and spangles, of which the crowd had despoiled the wearers; through the lowered blinds the garish light of day was fast stealing in. It seemed whole weeks of time to Honor since she and Lady Kissie had assisted in arraying one another for this fête, and since Bet had stood upon the doorstep, kissing hands to them, with Sancho wagging his tail beside her, and the tortoise tucked away under her arm. It all appeared such a long while ago, and yet—only a few short hours.

Presently, even the hum of voices ceased from below. The roll of the last departing carriage was dimly heard; a door or two closed heavily; a man's voice called out some commands, and then whistled a few bars of a lively waltz, which seemed to

die away down a distant passage; an early cock, half a mile away it seemed, crowed forth his morning salutation; otherwise there was not a sound. Complete silence fell upon everything.

Believing that she was forgotten, and too tired to make any effort at self-discovery, Honor determined to wait quietly until her chaperon should come out from the card-room, and with this intention lay back upon the cushions and had almost sunk into an exhausted sleep, when the door through which Colonel Blount had lately disappeared opened abruptly, and he again emerged from it, accompanied by the host, who was profuse in his apologies for having been compelled to leave her while seeing his guests away.

"You know I am a poor bachelor, Miss Bright," he said, suavely, "and so have extra duties laid upon my shoulders. These rooms of mine being 'bachelor's quarters' also, we usually wind up with a ten minutes' sojourn to the card-room. Colonel Blount says you will like, or at all events will not object, to look on."

He proffered his arm, which she was about to accept, when the colonel—who was standing a little awkwardly, thrusting his long, lean fingers through his beard—glanced suddenly at the opposite doorway, and saying, "Somebody wants you, Tibbs; join us when you are disengaged," took immediate possession of Honor, and whispered hurriedly in her ear as he led her to the adjoining room, where the host almost immediately followed them with the assurance that the colonel's vision had played him false. No messenger had come to seek him at all.

The apartment in which they found themselves was of moderate dimensions, and peculiarly shaped; the fireplace being in a corner, and the lighting, even for day purposes, arranged from above. The walls were panelled in dark oak; no ornament of any kind was visible; the softest of Turkey carpets covered the floor, and in the centre was a card-table, about which a small but select company was gathered, including five or six ladies, all of whom were smoking cigarettes.

Honor's appearance attracted a good deal of attention, especially amongst the men. She was deadly white, but never had her beauty been more plainly apparent; her charming features, calm and dignified as though sculptured in marble, were marked by no nervous fluttering. She was there to obey, and submission rather than interest was upon her face. Her polished shoulders shone in the subdued yet all too vivid light; the

virgin purity of her attire added to the loveliness of her face and form; her eyes glanced with a calm cold dignity from one to another of those present, as the host presented her to his especial friends; and as she took a seat facing the table, which Colonel Blount assigned her, more than one glass was covertly levelled, and three or four of the ladies gathered in a group together, and whispered stealthily about the new arrival.

That this notice was displeasing to her chaperon and embarrassing to herself was plainly visible to the watchful eye of their entertainer, who hastened by one or two successful stratagems to turn the attention of the company in another direction, and leave his young guest comparatively free from observation.

There was a very brief delay ere the preliminaries of play were arranged, and Colonel Blount took his place as banker. Half-a-dozen packs of cards were placed before him, and these he proceeded lengthily to shuffle, taking a good deal of time over the operation, and then leisurely distributing them from right to left, according to the rules of the game.

Ere long a six of diamonds appeared among the cards which faced the players, and this the banker moved very quietly up to the top of the packs. By-and-by, when a three showed at the bottom, he saw, without even raising his eyes, that Honor, who sat opposite, was drawing off her right glove, and at once moved it to the top, taking care to place two cards between it and the six, and two more above it. Accordingly, when he dealt, his own two cards were three and six, making nine, and from the murmured sensation which followed Honor gathered somehow or another that he had made an important coup, and that the host and second player had lost. But that they were playing for money she never dreamed. When they spoke at all, their tones were low; and much that she overheard was unintelligible to her.

The cards were then handed to be cut, and play recommenced, going on as before, with the result that Colonel Blount seemed to make a *series* of consecutive coups, guided by her pre-arranged signals, and was evidently regarded as a fortuitous winner. So soon as he quitted his post as banker and became a player, Honor's duties were at an end, and, although understanding little or nothing of the game, she found time, when released, to become interested in the movements and looks of others, and watched closely as play went on.

For awhile—a stranger keeping the bank—her guardian seemed to lose, but after a brief spell, having got a ten in his

share of the deal, he produced likewise a nine, and, exhibiting the ten and nine together, seemed to have made a big stroke, for the company—even those not engaged in play, and some who had actually not been even looking on—gathered round the table, and there was a deal of murmured discussion which Honor could not hear, for, as it grew louder and excitement seemed to be getting up, a patrician-looking woman, with a high nose and a very hawk-like eye (albeit extremely handsome), telegraphed back a glance from the host, and proceeded to engage her in animated conversation, laughing a good deal, and managing to drop a heavy scent-bottle, which compelled one or two of the men present to stoop and look for it, and altogether occasioned a diversion.

There was no attempt at further play after this, but rather a movement towards a breaking up among the company—most of whom, not being bidden to remain by the host, somewhat hurriedly departed, leaving almost a clear coast. When Honor rose from her seat, in obedience to a word from Colonel Blount, there were but two guests in the room—exclusive of themselves—the high-nosed woman, who was still disposed to be hilarious (should occasion require it), and a curious, gnarled-looking shabby little old man, whom the company had called “my lord”—perhaps as a *sobriquet*—and who had been the only one detained behind the others by the giver of the feast.

The hand of the wearied girl was already upon her chaperon’s arm, and she was turning to say farewell to their entertainer, when Sir Tittleum, who was speaking hurriedly with the guest whom he had specially requested to stay, advanced towards them, a good deal flushed, and addressing himself to Colonel Blount said,

“Don’t leave for awhile. I want a word with you. Miss Bright will, I am sure, allow Mrs. Westonbury to escort her to the next room.”

The colonel, whose face changed in colour, though not in calm, at once relinquished his charge, who, in much bewilderment, glanced for an instant at the two men confronting one another, and at the third, standing apparently unheeding, with his back partially turned upon the group, and his thin, big-knuckled fingers calmly stroking his unusually lengthy chin. Then she suffered herself to be led away, and entered the same deserted *salon* where the two society ladies had criticised and waited, and where she herself had so nearly fallen asleep.

Mrs. Westonbury shut the door very tight, and drew the arras across it—talking volubly all the while; but her efforts, clever though they were, could not shut out the noise of something which sounded not very unlike a scuffle, while through her vapid chatterings and forced laughter came distinctly the words, “cheated,”—“annulled the cut,”—“witness to prove,”—“useless to deny,”—“the nine concealed,”—and other sentences, which left no doubt that discussion of an unpleasant nature was going forward within the room they had so lately quitted.

Presently the voices grew lower—sank into a murmur—and after a moment or two the door opened, the arras was drawn aside, and the gnarled man appeared, looking in no way disturbed, and rubbing his bony fingers as though the chill morning air had rendered them cold. He bowed courteously to the two ladies, and, without pausing, passed through the room, and disappeared by the entrance-door.

Honor’s companion had scarcely time to tell her that he was a very great man indeed, the Earl of Oakton, a title extremely likely to become extinct—and to add that he would be an admirable match, but was not at all disposed to marry—when the murmur of voices arose again within the card-room, this time in low colloquy a considerable while sustained, and presently, the door again opening, Colonel Blount came out, pale, but perfectly calm, followed by the host, whose excited flush had entirely passed away.

The puzzling part of it was that they appeared to be excellent friends, and Honor, who had indeed for the last hour or two been in a kind of dream which seemed very unlike reality, began to think, nay, to feel certain, that the sentences she had fancied as spoken close by, had been uttered only in her own imagination, and that her ears, overstrained by excitement and fatigue, had played her entirely false.

They bade adieu to their host, who, at the same time, led Mrs. Westonbury to her brougham; and, having returned formal thanks for the hospitality shown them, they waited until the drowsy footman had roused up the fast-asleep driver of their carriage, and then got hurriedly in, and were driven away homewards.

Colonel Blount leaned back without a word. So silent was he that Honor would have thought he slept, had it not been for an occasional spasmodic jerking of the arms in which he

now and again indulged—and once, when she looked at him, she thought he smiled. Not at her, for he did not seem to see her—he was looking straight before him, at the two crested buttons on the back of the coachman's coat—but at something that was in his thoughts. After this she kept her eyes resolutely upon the pavement, where there was so little to be seen, except policemen and rain-spots; the former very few, and the latter uncomfortably many. A quick fervid shower had fallen, and had pricked the dry cold stonework into a dark lace-pattern of spots, out of which one could select the newest by their being sharper in outline and darker than the rest; and as the soft and needed rain fell quicker and more petulantly passionate, melting one drop into another, losing shape, plan, and purpose, until the flags were washed a luminous brown, and looked transparent, as slabs of Cairngorm agate, Colonel Blount's arm was stretched quietly across to close the window, and his voice, gentle as a woman's, said,

“If I do not take care of my lily, she will be washed away.”

He kissed her, too (for the first time), when, a few moments later, he said “Good night!” in the hall.

So Judas also kissed, when he betrayed.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER this, quite a number of strange things happened. Colonel Blount appeared entirely to alter in nature, and to grow marvellously amiable and kind. He no longer snapped and fumed at every imaginary grievance, or sat in morose silence as though wrapped in gloomy thought; on the contrary, he exerted himself in every possible way to please, and with such success that in place of trembling in his presence, Honor felt rather glad than otherwise whenever he joined the diminished circle, and, instead of shrinking from him, not unfrequently went to meet him when she heard his footstep in the hall; an attention which never failed to afford him the most manifest gratification. There was something so altogether novel in his demeanour that it seemed as though a new spirit, an altered and purified one, had entered into the flesh and dwelt there, to the intense improvement of the man, and the comfort and happiness of those about him. To Honor he assumed the ways of an indulgent parent, without any of the petty tyrannies and injustices of which many who are the most lavish of affection are at times prone to be guilty. Her lightest wish was considered, her least desire gratified; she had but to say, and whatever she willed was immediately accomplished.

Her dog, too, shared the benefits of the change so gladly welcomed by his mistress. He not merely enjoyed complete immunity from harsh treatment, but was even permitted the privileges of a parlour pet.

Honor was delighted. Her unsuspecting nature failed to see any undercurrent beneath the dark surface of the waters that flowed so smoothly, yet so deeply, so dangerously still. She had but one thought about the matter, the honest belief that it had been an ailing constitution which had alone embittered her guardian's disposition, and that with returning health had come also a return of the kindly nature she had associated with him at Nutley, and had since so grievously missed.

A decided drawback, however, to this new-found happiness was an almost equally observable alteration in Bet; nor was the change by any means of so agreeable a nature. In compliance with Colonel Blount's express desire—uttered, indeed, in almost the form of a command—Honor had maintained (a little unwillingly, yet with perfect obedience) complete silence respecting the concluding scenes of the festivities that had taken place at Sir Tittleum Tibbs' house. She had said nothing to Bet about the card-room, or the game of baccarat, or the part which she herself had played in it, or yet of Mrs. Westonbury, or my Lord Oakton, or the words which she had at first believed to have been uttered in wrath behind the arras, and had subsequently arrived at the conclusion had not been uttered at all. None of these things had she mentioned or alluded to in presence of her friend; yet, had Bet been possessed of every particular concerning them, she could not have displayed more manifest uneasiness, or a stronger desire to keep close guard over the girl in whose varied looks and movements she took so deep an interest. Her eyes and feet were everywhere. She appeared as though continually on the watch, and was more than ever assiduous in her attendance upon her father—keeping evidently some earnest vigil, while nevertheless bestowing on him the tenderest care.

Her manner to Honor was not a whit less affectionate than formerly, but it was more constrained; in short, it became anxious and preoccupied to the last degree. She listened intently to every word her parent uttered, more especially when he addressed himself to their young guest; she watched his every change of tone, every alteration of expression, noted even his gestures, as though on such slight things some heavy meaning hung. She followed his footsteps, too, wherever he went, and strove with covert acuteness to throw every conceivable obstacle in the way of his gaining an empire over the gentle and unsuspecting nature which she herself sought so jealously to guard. Betwixt father and friend—both so dearly loved—the girl's heart and thoughts were evidently strangely divided. It was clear that, owing to some unexplained reason, she was sorely handicapped in some earnest purpose she had in view, and it was pitiable at times to see the strained look upon her expressive face, and the terribly dark circles which anxiety or dread contrived to draw around her saddened and ever watchful eyes. She was at all times her father's most devoted slave, while her

affection for Honor was undeniably sincere ; yet, so far from desiring to see these two on terms of intimacy, such as would have been entirely natural between a guardian—self-appointed—and his ward, she was never so manifestly ill at ease as when they were together, or more thoroughly out of sorts than when the stronger nature persuaded the weaker to undertake or enter upon some expedition of which she, the watcher, did not altogether see the drift ; and, strange to say, this feeling extended to even the very quietest and briefest walk or drive of which she was not a sharer.

So palpable at length did her uneasiness at these things become, that Honor, who was candour itself, spoke openly to her about it, and was met by the kindly yet unsatisfying assurance that the only anxiety was for her well-being, and that she must not worry her mind about imaginary troubles. The watch, also, was at such times relaxed, for a few hours at least, as though to avert aroused suspicion—only to be renewed again with greater vigilance than before.

Was Bet jealous of her father's newly-conceived affection for the orphan girl whose only shelter was his house ? It certainly looked as if it were so ; and yet it seemed impossible that a nature so truly noble, beneath all the mould and tarnish which covered it, could or would be guilty of so despicable a feeling.

“ Are you vexed with me ? Are you *jealous* of me ? ” Honor asked, despairingly, one day, when, on entering the library attired for a ride with Colonel Blount, his daughter's face assumed the same look of pain and unrest which made it often appear so pinched and old ; and Bet—laying aside the duster with which she was, according to custom, laying vigorously about her—kissed the sweet lips that asked the question, and answered with a smile that she was only vexed with things for which nobody was one bit accountable, and that her jealousy, if it existed, was solely for the welfare and happiness of the girl from whose pleading looks—even while she spoke—she turned her eyes away. This was far from being altogether satisfactory, as Honor too deeply felt—but with it she was fain to rest content.

Sir Tittleum Tibbs came often during this time, and his visits, to one at least, if not to two, were a source of extreme uneasiness. He was too patrician to be presuming, too courtly to be commonplace in his wooing. He made no rush for rapid

reward, no bold stroke for the ensurement of sudden success, but rather crept gradually onward, without manifesting any undue haste, to the goal for which he was striving.

Honor regarded his addresses with inexplicable shrinking; the more so because she could not help perceiving that, with all his calm courtesy and suavity of demeanour, there was about him a hidden *confidence of manner* which seemed saying, all too plainly—"When I ask I shall also have." This was intolerable to the girl whose suitor he affected to be. She refused his attentions, declined his gifts, left his letters, written under various pretences, entirely unanswered, and sought to show him by every means in her power that his addresses, if encouraged by her elders, were decidedly distasteful to herself. Politeness, of course, and duty towards her guardian's guest, forbade her to be otherwise than courteous when her admirer visited the house, but she never for an instant stepped beyond the frigid civilities which one stranger might offer to another, and which the exigencies of polite society demanded.

Strange to say, Colonel Blount interfered in no way with all this, nor sought by any influence to disannul it; while according in his own person the warmest possible encouragement to the baronet's attentions, he offered no comment upon the different demeanour of the girl whom Sir Tittleum's suit was meant to honour. Doubtless he was actuated by some wise policy which he intended should appear by-and-by.

Lady Kissie was likewise a frequent visitor, and formed a fourth on many an organised expedition which Honor would have infinitely preferred not joining, had she not been overruled by a will that was stronger than her own. There were times, and such were not unfrequent, when her own and Bet's entreaties induced her guardian to yield compliance to her request to be excused—but he showed now and again a stolid determination to have his own way, which was not to be resisted, and which Honor, with affectionate deference to his desires, refrained from combating, preferring rather to give up her own wishes than to fret or vex him by offering a settled opposition to those which he expressed.

There were trips to Richmond on Sir Tittleum's drag, with Honor, despite her shrinking, occupying the box-seat beside the aristocratic driver of the four spanking bays, which drew so many eyes to the showy vehicle, as it bowled gaily along the pleasant sunny road. There were dinners at the "Star and Garter," at Sir Tittleum's expense, and at these Lady Kissie

shone resplendent, criticising the *ménu*, ordering the wines, discussing the best brands and most *recherché* viands, and flinging about her a glittering atmosphere of wit and *espièglerie* such as had for long rendered her famous for winning men's hearts, and it must be confessed for driving them also (when rejected) to do as young Crawshay had lately done.

There were rows on the river in Sir Tittleum's highly ornamental boat, with Honor sitting demurely beneath her wide sunshade, enjoying the delicious breeze; and Lady Kissie, in tight jersey and sailor hat, steering, and smoking, and singing "Twickenham Ferry" in a very high key, to the disgust of the patient anglers, who are always to be found "waiting for nothing" on the Thames, and to the intense delight of the steam-barge men, who joined with tremendous gusto in the refrain, and sent the notes of the "Ho, ye ho—ho!" far over the river with a not unmusical sound.

There were Sunday excursions to Greenwich, too, and fish dinners at the "Trafalgar" and old "Ship," with strolls beforehand to the Observatory and through the venerable park, where Colonel Blount and her ladyship invariably sat down on a seat which would only accommodate two, leaving Honor to roam about with her admirer, and to make use of the seat when, on coming back, it was in turn vacated by the two who had till then occupied it.

There were week-day dinners at the Orleans, and drives to various fashionable resorts, including one or two race-meetings, at which Lady Kissie distinguished herself by betting to an extent which, for a woman, might have been called "plunging," and winning a good deal of money and any quantity of gloves; losing sometimes, too, and doing it with a very good grace.

Honor could not help observing, with mingled pleasure and surprise, that she herself was not asked, during all this time, to accompany her guardian into any card-room, nor was there even the smallest hint of a desire that she should play. On the contrary, there was in her presence a studied reticence concerning all such matters; and when, on three different occasions, her host's dinner guests adjourned to the room in which she had previously sat with Bet and asked questions concerning the players, instructions were given that she was not to follow, but rather to go to bed early, as she would have a good deal to get through the next day.

One of two things she had to thank for this welcome state of

affairs; either Bet was responsible for it, or her guardian was unwilling, for some reasons of his own, that she should witness any further play, or solve, by observation or otherwise, the real mysteries of poker, baccarat, or whist. Of this latter hypothesis, however, she scarcely dreamed; the former seemed by far the more probable of the two, and it she accepted for fact, returning thanks in her heart in a direction where, for once at all events, none happened to be due.

Through all the varied gaieties which were pressed upon her, and in which she took unwilling part, Honor passed with a perfectly unturned head. The life was one in which she found no pleasure. Occasionally, with a feeling natural to youth, she enjoyed an hour or so upon the river, or at the opera, or in participating in some healthy excursion—but, as a rule, her heart was far from all such things, and it was at night, when the day's excitement was over, that the reaction set in with full force. Then, burying her face among the pillows, or more frequently on Bet's kindly breast, she would go back in fancy to the years of her quiet life at Nutley, and, associating with them all the happiness she had ever known, wail forth regretful memories of bygone things, and like a wearied child sob herself to sleep.

Of Derrick throughout this period she saw nothing—except at a distance. Twice she passed him, she and her guardian, riding with Lady Kissie in the park, and was politely but somewhat formally bowed to, without any attempt at speech—for she was leaning at the time on the arm of Sir Tittleum Tibbs, and her name was coupled with his by many of the fashionable tongues which were talking freely about them.

Mr. Jessel came once during Mrs. Blount's absence, and remained three whole days on a visit at the house. He was very courtly and agreeable during the short limit of his stay, made one of the party wherever they went, and seemed to get along capitally with his titled rival, despite an evident knowledge that he was such. Honor sedulously avoided being left alone in the society of her guardian's agent. Difficult it would doubtless have been to have avoided what he as sedulously sought, but a modest hint to Bet kept the girl constantly at her side, and it was not until he was bidding adieu on the day of departure that he ventured to slip a note into her hand. She read it quietly in her own chamber:—

"I have sought in vain to speak with you, apart from others' presence. *The time is drawing on.* I am not in any way changed, except in being more than ever desirous of winning your regard. Rumour, and my own eyes, have told me that I have a rival—but bear in mind that, despite his wealth and other attractions, he can do far less for your benefit than I can, who am willing to sign myself, your humble slave,

"W. J. JESSEL."

She burnt the note at her bed-room candle, and lay awake all that night, thinking how she could best reply to it next day.

Later on, as the season waned, other and more important changes came. Mrs. Blount returned from her extended visit to Buxton, much benefited in health, and seemingly in temper also, for nothing could exceed the sweetness of her demeanour to the girl whom she had previously so deeply offended and grieved. Scarcely had she arrived at home, and taken up the thread of her former butterfly life, when her lord was summoned to Ireland on some business which Mr. Jessel thought sufficiently important to necessitate his making a hurried journey thither, and a stay of at least ten days.

Then came the greatest event of all. Derrick arrived one afternoon, and remained for dinner. A very pleasant surprise, certainly, but nothing in comparison with that which awaited Honor when he announced to her, during the progress of the evening, that "good-night," when he should say it, was not to mean "good-bye," as he had no intention of going away, but rather purposed remaining a trespasser on his mother's bounty for the few succeeding days which must elapse between that time and his departure for Ireland, whither his regiment was under orders to proceed. This turned out to be actually true, and no jest, as his hearer at first believed it to be. He took up his abode at the house, and made his temporary home there, with as many snug and luxurious surroundings as though he never meant to go away any more.

That week was a bright and happy oasis in the sahara of Honor's chequered life. It was one of almost uninterrupted pleasure, because of Derrick's constant companionship, uninterfered with by others who would have been so much less welcome than he.

The manner in which Bet contrived that this should be so, was worthy of that clever young diplomatist. The decoys she made

use of to persuade her step-mother to go out to various places of day and evening resort; the allurements she set forth, and the eloquence with which she descanted on them, as inducements for Mrs. Blount to betake herself thither; the manner in which she talked her into accepting otherwise declined invitations; the way she cajoled her into believing that Honor's health was suffering from undue dissipation, and that the girl's only chance of ever recovering her looks lay in being permitted to remain in quietude for awhile; the persuasions she used to induce her relative to take Lady Kissie for her companion on various gay and lengthy excursions, in place of "murdering that poor innocent country girl with her whirligig whims;" the traps she laid to prevent her bouncing in upon the preoccupied pair at inconvenient moments, to say nothing of the rich dishes she bribed the cook to concoct, and the rare old crusted port (a week of gout in every bottle) which was carried up from the cellar by her own hands, in order to induce an auspicious little visit from the enemy of *feet*, and give her stepmother something to complain of (Mrs. Blount loved complaining) for a day or two at least—making it necessary, also, for that aggrieved lady to keep strictly within the limits of her own chamber.

It was likewise a marvellous study to view the manner in which the indefatigable worker contrived to keep Sir Tittleum Tibbs at bay, and prevent his addresses from clashing with those of somebody she was far more desirous of serving. She was, indeed, an invaluable ally in one especial quarter, while proving herself a sad detriment to the interests of the other, forgetting to deliver his messages, waylaying his bouquets, and planting herself in his way whenever he, the depressed suitor, believed himself to be just on the eve of a *tête-à-tête* interview with Honor.

And if Bet was a skilled diplomatist, which she certainly was, she was no less a "daisy picker" of remarkable intelligence and address. She never used her eyes except to stare out of window or glue them upon a book; she grew suddenly completely deaf, never hearing, even when spoken to—while her tongue forgot to move, except when humming a tune, talking nonsense to Sancho, or warning her two friends that an enemy was on the march.

The subterfuges, too, to which she resorted for the purpose of leaving the lovers—as she believed them—alone together were quite on a par with her other accomplishments in a

similar line. Sometimes she had to go out, or she had a cold in her head and had to go on the landing to sneeze, or was "desperate hungry" and had to eat, or thirsty and was compelled to drink—each of which processes entailed the necessity of leaving the room for quite an hour or more. Sometimes, too, she had a headache or a faceache, which obliged her to tie her jaws up in a poultice and remain isolated from all contact with disturbing influences. Occasionally she had a lady visitor who occupied her, or the Reverend Samuel Sweggles came in to see Mrs. Blount, and had to be provided with two luncheons and a substantial afternoon tea before he could be persuaded to go on his way rejoicing. Bet was in her glory. With her father's absence from London all her gloom vanished. The cloud, which for days had hung over her spirit, broke rapidly up and dispersed. She was full of mirthful sayings, and odd, queer tricks, which were so much her characteristic that apart from them she was not herself. Altogether it was a gala time for the young people; and although Lady Kissie sought by the employment of various stratagems to spoil it for them—and, with her usual subtlety, laid sundry traps for the purpose of catching the unwary—the indomitable Bet contrived to meet her always upon her own ground, and to send her off the tournament-field with her lances a good deal shaken, and a very decided impression upon her mind of having come off but second best in the contest. To use the combatant's own words, she "could hit out at miladi from the shoulder, and land her one with the left, in places where she least expected to get it."

To Honor those brief days were like an after-taste of some delicious sweetness which she had thought was for ever passed away. Sitting long hours with Derrick; hearing him read aloud, though it were only an army list or a copy of *Bell's Life*; playing for him, though he cared for nothing except the "Sweet-heart's Waltz;" singing to him, though he only enjoyed sporting songs, or love ones; walking with him, in dreadful terror lest they should meet Mrs. Blount, and be turned back like naughty children out without leave; driving with him in swift but perilous hansom, with the driver going ahead at full speed in the face of every obstacle, and the tall horse performing a skating movement over the wooden pavements, and finally coming down upon his lean side, with a tremendous show of hoofs and tail, and a large amount of damaged harness, together

with a goodly array of unparliamentary language made use of in the endeavour to get him on his legs again. Yes, it was all delightful! sitting with Derrick, too, in the cosy library in Grosvenor Place, in happy forgetfulness of intrusive sunbeams and buzzing flies—forgiving even of the “Battle of Prague,” thundered forth so often on the other side of the insufficient wall, and thinking the “cries of the wounded” considerably less doleful than they had formerly sounded. Even the “big gun” was on such occasions pardoned, and the small shot of the battle passed harmlessly by. Very happy hours they truly were, spent in such calm enjoyment of the present that the future seemed a thing of nought, and the past, if remembered, was but as a dream. Halcyon days for Honor, listening to Derrick, talking with him, differing from him, agreeing with him, freezing and thawing him again, quarrelling and making up with him, offending and forgiving—it was indeed a time of roses—one never to be forgotten in the annals of a life wherein the perfume of flowers had of late so rarely risen above the mould.

Deverill’s stay could last but one short week longer, and then Colonel Blount was to return—accompanied, if possible, by Mr. Jessel—and after a few winding-up days of “season” gaieties, they were all—Derrick excepted—to depart for Scotland, where it was intended they should make a lengthened tour; going in the autumn to Hinckley to pass some weeks at a country seat, famed for its beauty and surroundings: Knotty Cross, lately the property of the deceased Mr. Bright, and now, like Nutley, in possession of his fortunate successor. Shooting and cub-hunting were there to be had in abundance, and Colonel Blount had already invited a large party of sporting friends to enjoy the hospitalities of his far-famed Leicestershire mansion.

One week only, and Derrick would have to go!—seven grudgingly brief, miserably hurried days, were all that the light was to remain above the darkness, ere there should come—as seemed inevitable—a blackness that should be felt. To others, perhaps—pleasure, variety, happiness, the joy which springs from bright surroundings—for Honor, only gloom.

Seven days! What were they? Rapid, running, racing things, flying away with such astonishing swiftness that it was evening with each before the morning seemed well to have begun.

Every night, when Honor went to bed, she jealously counted one off the number, and sighed as she laid it to rest.

CHAPTER XXVI.

At length the last came. Somehow it always does, when we desire most strongly to stave it off, and when the feeling of inability to do so is most keenly upon us. It was a day of soft quiet rain—tiny rivulets running down every window pane, and a generally humid aspect over everything within and without the house.

Mrs. Blount had gone off to hunt up Lady Kissie, with the object of inducing the erratic beauty to accompany her to an extensive card-party which was fixed to take place that night. Bet was posted as sentinel—self appointed—at the breakfast-room window, keeping stealthy watch for the arrival of Sir Tittleum Tibbs, and holding herself in immediate readiness to bear down upon him and bowl him over when he should come, according to custom, to make his afternoon call. Deverill and Honor were in the study, Colonel Blount's own special snugery, and consequently the cosiest room in the house. It was a very prince of rooms! It was more than comfortable: it was luxurious. The windows were shrouded in curtains of crimson plush—the furniture was covered with it—the carpet, the table covers, everything was of crimson, and beautifully soft. There was a piano, too, in a quiet corner—a tiny pianette rather—stowed away among piles of books, and looking half-ashamed of finding itself in the midst of so much luxury and learning. Colonel Blount loathed music, but, because it was a passion with Honor and he wished to have her constantly about himself, he pretended to like it, and, having ordered an instrument to be placed in his room, was in the habit of asking her to play and sing to him—although, while she did so, he sat in dire anguish, enduring the tortures of the unblest.

At the present moment Derrick's hands were busy upon the keys, performing in very unskilful fashion—being, in fact, engaged in "picking out" the refrain of an old and hackneyed pantomime song. Honor was seated quietly in the corner of a wide couch, enduring the noise, with a bundle of crewels by

her side, a piece of embroidery in her fingers, and a very grave, white face bent above it. It reddened a little, and grew a shade less sober, when her companion quitted his musical studies, and threw himself on the rug at her feet. But she never looked up—only said,

“That is Sancho’s place. See, you have disturbed him!”

“He will have you all to himself when I am gone,” the young man answered, grudgingly; “he may at least resign in favour of me for one half-hour, which is about all that I have to stay. How happy this week has been! and how quickly it has gone!”

He waited in expectation of an answer, for a word of some sort, but none came. The sweet lips quivered for an instant, but that was all. More eloquent by far than speech, had he only seen it, but his eyes were less alive than his ears, so he lost what he so much wanted to gain.

“Very good of my mother, though, to have had me here at all,” he presently said; and his tone had something peculiar about it, not easily understood.

“Are you not her son?” asked Honor, in a low voice.

“Yes; she has always said so, but that is the very reason. Mothers expect so much—and I am so sadly wanting.”

A long pause ensued. Evidently Honor was not disposed for conversation, and as evidently her companion was desirous that she should speak. Presently he looked up.

“Have you really and actually been believing all this while that I was one of the household by Mrs. Blount’s invitation?” he inquired.

“Most certainly I have.” Her face had grown even graver than before.

“Well, you were never more mistaken in all your life. She did not invite me to come at all.”

“Then, how does it happen that you are here? Not against her will, certainly?”

“Yes; entirely against her will, as I verily believe; but I wanted to come at this particular time, and she had so often pressed me about it, and so frequently told me to turn up at precisely such periods as might happen to suit myself, that I took her at last at her word, and astonished her so immensely that she could find no excuse for entering a protest of any sort.”

Not a word did Honor say in reply to this, and whether her face expressed approval or otherwise remained a profound mystery,

for her back was to the light, and her head stooped above the crewel-work which her deft fingers were executing—a rural landscape, with three short-waisted children in the foreground, wearing frilled trousers and feathered hats, and engaged in trundling hoops, in presence of a magnificent raven and an astonished cow.

“I do not believe you are a bit sorry that I am going away!” Deverill said, pettishly; “we have been so pleasant all the week, that I was actually presumptuous enough to think you might regret me *a little*.”

Honor lifted her small head ever so slightly, and pursed up her pretty mouth. This because he had turned, and was looking at her, with fixed, inquiring eyes.

“You know we are always destined to part less pleasantly than we meet,” she said, demurely. “Things would be out of all course were it to be otherwise now.”

“Yet why should things be as they are?” he petulantly asked; “if you were not the true woman that I believe you, I should think you the veriest coquette alive.”

“Perhaps I am,” she quietly answered, picking away at the silks with her dainty fingers, and smiling a little provoking smile.

“No, you are not; but you are a puzzle—a mystery—beyond my fathoming. Here have I been a whole week, cheating myself into the belief that you cared a little bit for me, and now, when it comes to the last, you are as cold as an icicle, to show me that you don’t.”

He got up fretfully, and leaned upon the mantel-piece with a very aggrieved air. Honor said nothing—only threaded her needle afresh, and added another horn to the cow whose destiny was to remain staring in bewilderment at the frilled children and the trundled hoops. The rain splashed outside, and the clock ticked away within. There was no other sound, except an occasional snore from Sancho, who evidently felt glad at having his accustomed place restored to him, and evinced his contentment in a somewhat equivocal manner.

Deverill raised his eyes to the gilded timepiece, and then glanced at his watch.

“Both the same,” he muttered, “and both correct. In thirty-seven minutes I must be at Victoria; it will take me eight or ten to drive there, and I shall require ten in advance for such preparations as remain to be made. I have therefore

the enormous number of seventeen to stop in this room—with you. Am I to hear the sound of your voice before I go?"

"Certainly. What would you wish me to talk about?"

Her tone was quite cheerful. He looked at her, longer and more closely than he had ever perhaps done before, a searching and eager look, full of a keen interest which he made no effort to conceal. Had there been the faintest tremor of lip or eyelid he must have seen it, and been gratified. There was none. Self-command was Honor's chiefest characteristic, and all of it that she possessed had been summoned for this parting interview. It stood her in good stead. She neither winced nor changed colour in the very least. Fortunately for her she was always pale, or the fluttering of her heart and its consequent effects must most certainly have betrayed her.

Derrick left his post and sat beside her. He laid a detaining hand on the work she was doing, and strove to draw it away, but she held it fast.

"Can you not give your attention to me for awhile?" he said, "even for a moment or two, instead of to that—that thing?"

"I can attend to both you and it quite well," was all she said; and for an instant her pure cheek flushed a momentary red. It went hard with her to try him so, but if he were in earnest he would not mind it; and, if otherwise, better that she should meet him on his own ground. It was too soon, or she thought it so, to let him perceive that she really cared about him. The past night, on his side, have been all flirtation—not likely, certainly, but quite possible—consequently he was not to know that it had been otherwise with her; and, with this object in view, she sat calmly at her work, holding it now and again a little way off, to watch the effect of the blended colours, and occasionally humming a fragment of a tune when the silence became oppressive.

Deverill sat and watched her with a troubled look. Had she been any other woman in the universe, he would have caught her hands, and prisoned them in his own; with her he could not. It would have seemed presumptuous. A hundred varied feelings kept him back.

"Why do you always get vexed with me—for nothing, too, that I am aware of—just when I am on the eve of going away?" he not unreasonably asked, "I am sure I have not done anything to deserve it—this time."

He certainly had not. He had told her no vexing stories of former flirtations, or even hinted at previous wounds. He had tormented her with no jealous questions concerning other admirers, of whose existence he was aware; nor had he seemed for so much as an instant to suspect her of favouring such. He had never even mentioned Mr. Jessel, or evinced any unfriendly feeling towards his more powerful rival, Sir Tittleun Tibbs. He had said nothing derogatory of Bet, but had, on the contrary, manifested a more than average regard for that peculiar member of the household, whose wildest oddities seemed, nevertheless, to be always reserved for his benefit, and who was apparently at some pains to appear at her worst whenever he was by. He had ignored Lady Kissie, paying her barely such attentions as the requirements of society demanded. In short, he had done nothing amiss, and all his devotion had been shown to herself alone. Yet, with all this—and it was much—came ever the recollection of his mother's warnings, and the doubts cast by her upon his motives and intentions. Was he indeed capable of amusing himself at her expense? It seemed scarcely credible; yet, according to Mrs. Blount's showing, few things, if any, were too unconscientious for him to attempt, and, however unlikely, there was no doubt it *might* be so.

Matters certainly seemed sadly unequal. Somehow the scales of justice did not appear to hang straight. To him she had given—long since, though half unconsciously—the true, warm love of her young heart; for him she had rejected every other offer, discouraged all other attentions, turned with unutterable shrinking from prospects which others would have deemed highly eligible. He was her first love, and would likewise be her last; and yet she knew, even by his own acknowledgment, that with him such was far from being the case. The knowledge was not sweet: it was bitter as wormwood to her soul; yet, inasmuch as he had not sought to deceive her, she was not grievously vexed. Was it, indeed, ever otherwise? Since the world began, woman has been bringing the rich, ripe first-fruits of her young and pure affections to the man she loves, while he in return has proffered her the scanty gleanings of his wasted harvest, or endowed her with the sered leaves of his premature winter, as a set-off against the luscious excellence of her virgin offering. And with what result?—that the world and all belonging to it, the woman not excluded, have regarded it as an equal and righteous bargain. Better, perhaps, that it should be

so; happier thus, than that measure for measure should be looked for, or unjust weight meted again.

Somewhat different, however, was it with Derrick from the ordinary state of things; not quite so uneven was the balance in which his love and Honor's were to be weighed. True, he had met with too much beauty to have remained altogether immaculate—had been subjected to too much fierce temptation to have always been able to withstand wiles which, in many instances, had been employed to ensnare him; but he had led no riotous life, or wasted any of his substance. He had not been as the young and rich generally are; dissipation had not become habitual, or frivolity grown as a second nature to him. Few men, possessed of youth, passion, wealth, an unusual share of good looks, and unfettered by any tie of marriage or betrothal, had for years roamed the world, and battled against its influences as he had done, without taking off far more of its dross upon their outer being. Despite the ephemeral regard which he had here and there, butterfly-fashion, bestowed on those who had for the most part angled for it, he had yet within his heart a deep, deep well of true and pure affection, the depths of which were worth sounding—and these Honor had to their centre stirred. He loved her dearly—fondly—but there is always this difference in the love of women and of men, that in the former, when once admitted, it engrosses all the sources of thought, and excludes every object save itself—while in the latter, it is mingled with all the former reflections and feelings which the past yet bequeaths, and cannot, however powerful its nature, constitute the *whole* of either happiness or woe. The love of man, once his amorous first youth is over, is not so much a new emotion, as a revival and concentration of departed affections which he has from time to time felt for others, without, perhaps, ever permitting to gain complete empire.

Deverill's early life had been calculated to teach him *mistrust*, and, where this is the case, love—entire love, such as he felt for Honor—is slow to come as a visitant to the heart which disappointment has chilled and hardened. As a very young man, he had entered the army without fortune, and found himself snubbed. His father's unexpected decease ere long supplied him with much that he had formerly lacked, and from that date affairs materially changed. Possessed of wealth and name, pursuing pleasure rather as a necessary excitement than anything worthy in itself, agreeable to his associates because his

possessions contributed to their enjoyment and his temper to their amusement, he found himself courted by many, and avoided by none. He soon discovered that civility is, in too many instances, but the mask of design. He smiled at the kindness of fathers who looked to his support in various undertakings; he saw in the attentions of mothers an anxiety for their daughters' establishment, and a servile respect for his riches; and, in the cordiality of sons who had horses to sell and debts to pay, he detected that veneration for his money which implied contempt for its possessor. By nature observant, and by instruction sarcastic, he looked upon the various colourings of society with a searching and philosophic eye—marvelled at the intricacies which knit servility with arrogance, meanness with ostentation—and traced to its source that universal vulgarity of inward sentiment and external manner, which to him appeared to constitute the unvarying characteristic of his countrymen. In proportion as his knowledge increased, he lost much of his grasp upon wisdom, and, thirsting ever for the truth as well as the tenderness of love, found but its fever and its falsehood. Like Spenser's Florimel, he mistook the delusive fabrication of the senses for the divine reality of the heart, and only awoke from the deceit when the phantoms he had worshipped melted into snow.

From the hour in which his love for Honor had stood self-confessed, his soul had become more pure. Hitherto the sex had been a problem which he had never rightly solved. He had concentrated his knowledge of it into aphorisms and antitheses, nor dreamt of exceptions whilst not finding himself deceived in the general summing-up. When true love refined him, he confessed that he had erred; from that moment he renounced the distrustful reflections of a spoilt and agitated life, he returned with transport to his boyhood's visions of fidelity and love, and dedicated them on the altar of his soul to her who, by the teachings of her pure and guileless nature, had concentrated and breathed them into life.

They sat together, then, these two, on that last and dismal day; both loving, yet unhappy,—one striving by the wearing of a mask to hide the real feelings of a timid heart; the other endeavouring to rend it off, yet ignorant of the way to do it.

"Am I to go—must I—without hearing what I want so *much* to hear?" Deverill asked, almost sadly. "Will you not tell me that you care something about me; even a little bit."

"Yes, decidedly I do," she answered cheerily, "more than 'a little bit.' When I like, it is not by inches. I adore Sancho; and Jehoshaphat, the tortoise, has quite won his way to my heart. Nothing by halves, you see."

Deverill drew back, chilled. The look of rapture with which he had heard her opening words died rapidly out of his face, and one of settled pain replaced it. The most sanguine lover on earth could scarcely feel elated at being classed in company with a tortoise and a dog.

"You are cruel," he said, bitterly; "often as you have endeavoured to crush me, there has always hitherto been time—and apparently a measure of inclination—to revive me again; but now"—he glanced anew at the timepiece—"there are only three minutes left to heal my wound, and it is a very sore one. Give me a little balm—even the smallest. I need it badly."

There was a pause—Honor's heart fighting against her reserve, and gaining rapid victory. She lifted her eyes from the tangle of coloured silks on which they had been so long fastened, and raised them slowly to his face. Had she done so but one second sooner its earnestness must have melted the ice which the chill hand of doubt had piled about her fearing yet yearning heart. As it was, that brief glance took in only a half-averted face, a retreating gesture, and a look of sudden alarm. The cause was reasonable, and might easily have been explained. A trifling noise in the corridor had, in the short pause which succeeded his appeal, caused him to believe that some intrusive servant, or Mrs. Blount herself perhaps, was about to trespass on their solitude, and we all know how quickly, in such and similar cases, action treads upon the heels of thought. Hence his glance, his movement, his surprise. But Honor interpreted them differently. She saw, in the averted head, a desire that she might not read his thoughts; in the drawing back, the semblance of what he meant to do; in the startled look, regret for what he had said. It was enough. His mother's words, "When he marries, if he ever does, it is not such as you he will select," with the fiercer set-off of, "He has very little respect for women; they have spoilt him, and he despises them all alike," came rushing in scorching characters through her brain. They dried up, they devoured, every soft and gentle impulse of her eminently womanly nature, and left, in place of angel whispers, a fiendish discord which jarred through every fibre of her sensitive frame. An angry flush swept like a prairie

fire across her varying face, and she paled again to a deadly whiteness as she answered,

"A little balm? By all means. Let me see what it shall be. What is it that heals best with men? Ah, precisely. You will find excellent cigars in that cabinet facing you, and Colonel Blount keeps a store of other admirable things in one of the inner lockers. I am sure you are quite welcome to make use of all. I have the keys; there they are!"

She held them towards him with a short hysteric laugh, and they dropped on the floor with a jangling sound, which might have been the echo of her soulless mirth. He gave her one look, one only; sorrow, wrath, disappointment, bitter reproach, mingled together, yet each prominently distinct. She read them all—saw, likewise, the fervent, passionate, earnest love with which he regarded her; saw it, knew its truth at last, and knew also that she had in that supreme moment thrown it to the winds. She had scattered what she might have reaped; had trampled down and trodden upon the one flower which in all life's garden was the only one she would have cared to pluck! Oh, is there any grief so poignant as the knowledge that we have made our own misery, poisoned our cup, flung away the last straw to which we might in weal and woe have clung? This was what Honor had done. Facing the man she so loved, and yet so wronged, she felt her act in all its bald unworthiness, its irrevocable folly. Her eyes were opened, but with the light that fell on them the darkness of the grave was mingled.

They stood regarding one another for a moment, not more; but for both it seemed too long. Their looks fell to the ground. It was as though eternal rivers had rolled between them, and they knew they were divided.

Deverill looked about him in a scared, purposeless sort of way, then took up his hat, as if in a dream, and held out his hand, which shook in a way he could not control. Worlds would she have given to have thrown herself even then upon his breast, knowing, as she at last knew, how much he loved her; but shame, remorse, lack of any encouragement upon his stony face, chilled the purpose within her heart, and crushed the bud from which a fair garland of promise might have sprung. Another instant and it was too late; he had turned away! So are kingdoms in a moment lost, and Nature's divinest realm—the human soul—finds itself bereft and shattered by the bitter knowledge of *what might have been*.

She gave him her hand in utter silence ; and without a word, without even another look at the face which was henceforth to be but a memory, he went out from her presence, more cursed and blighted than Gehazi was of old.

And Honor ?—left alone to wrestle with her self-reproach ; to bear the stings of a torment, self-imposed, the scorplings of the torch which her own hand had lighted ! Oh, thou untameable conscience that never flatterest, that watchest over the human heart, never to slumber or to sleep, it is thou that takest from us the present, barrest to us the future, and knittest the eternal chain that binds us to the Rock and Vulture of the past.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GONE! No; surely it could not be. The spot where he had stood was not really empty—the couch where he had sat with her was not altogether untenanted. She stretched her hands in the empty void which his presence had so lately filled, and then clasped them tightly over her face, as though to shut out light and thought together.

“Oh, my dear! my dear!” she wailed forth. “I do love you; I know now how much! There is no use in striving to fight against it, or in trying to make you believe that I am indifferent: none, none! And now I have sent you from me for ever! Oh! what *have* I done?”

It was a very white and humbled face that those slender fingers at length slowly uncovered. The room and all in it seemed to have grown suddenly dark. The rain beat more pitilessly than ever against the drenched window panes, and the wind—hitherto still—sighed and moaned about the house as though in sympathy with her distress. She approached the door, listened at it with heart tumultuously throbbing, and beat upon it with her restless hands.

“Come back! Oh, come back to me, my love—my love!” she cried, through trembling lips; but no answer came, and sitting down to the book-strewn table, she laid her arms upon it and hid her face on them in bitterest grief.

“Well, if this isn’t a precious to-do, I’d like to know what is?” said a voice presently beside her, while a check duster of enormous dimensions was whirled across a copy of “Rabelais,” on which one of her hands was partially resting. “What on earth have you been and gone and done? And where’s the man?”

Honor looked wearily up. Bet was by her side, the skirt of her gown pinned about her waist, her hands ornamented by huge wash-leather gloves, and an old bathing-cap of hideous appearance perched upon her head. Never had she looked so odd—so thoroughly grotesque. She was making up all kinds

of faces, and her queer eyes were blinking and roving about her, as though they belonged to one partially, if not altogether, demented.

Honor was, however, too blinded by feeling to observe all this. She saw only that a friend was near, and throwing her arms about the neck round which she had grown accustomed to cling, she laid her face upon the trusty shoulder and burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Don't waste the water, or we'll have a drought!" said Bet, in a queer voice as if it were coming up from a pit, or mine—"I don't want a bath at all: washing's waste of time, in my opinion, as I once told you before—and here you've gone and drenched me to the skin! There's a half-pint of water down my back this minute. How do you mean to dry me I'd like to know?"

Honor made no answer, nor wept less. The floodgates of her tears once unlocked, they were indeed coming with overwhelming bitterness and force.

"Where's the man, I say?" repeated Bet, wagging her head till the bathing-cap threatened to topple over. "If you don't answer me, I'll spank you—just for your good, you know, as the Step says. Rouse up now, and stop crying, or I'm blest if I won't have to open an umbrella to shelter myself. What have you done with that champion torment and torturer, Major Derrick Deverill? Has Sankey eaten him, or where is he at all?"

"Gone!" wailed Honor, with another burst. "For ever, too. We shall never meet any more!"

"Fol de rol de riddle, fol de riddle, fol de ray!" sang Bet, squinting at her nose, as though it were a nut and her eyes were crackers: "'Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye,' and all the rest of it. Well this *is* high jinks. Would you mind having the rest of your cry on the other shoulder, and letting me know what's up?"

But Honor did not move.

"I thought he might not *really* care for me," she moaned; "you remember what his mother said, the night she warned me: and——"

"Yes, and I remember, too, how I bade you not mind a word out of *her* mouth," said Bet, stolidly. "I knew her before you did, you donkey! Well—go on. You thought he didn't care for you? Pray, what on earth do you want a fellow to do? As if he hasn't been going daft about you all this last week: salting his tea, and sugaring his eggs, and offering the Step his musty

old 'bacca-pipe when she asked him to hand her the *Times*. I'm sure if that isn't enough for you, you're mighty hard to satisfy. I'm waiting now to hear the rest. What happened next?"

Honor lifted her drowned face, and laid it against that of her companion.

"I doubted him," she whispered, "something urged me to it—and I was vexed, and offended him. It was then, and only then, I saw how he had been wronged; but it was too late to see it! I have sent him away, and"—sobbing wildly—"he will never, never come back!"

"Of course he won't; not likely;" said Bet, speaking as though her voice were down a ladder, and never meant to come up again. "I hope you said a proper good-bye, and gave him your blessing before he went; because, you know, he's off to Ireland to-morrow, and if those Peep-o'-day boys, or Blue-ribbon men, or whatever they are, get a hold of him there, you'll never see a bone of his body again! Did you give him a kiss, my dear, by way of God speed?"

"No; oh, no!" said Honor, shrinkingly. "I did not indeed, or think of such a thing."

"Not even a little one?" queried Bet, with a grin on the disengaged side of her face; "are you sure, now?"

"Perfectly sure," with a little indignant sob; "he did not even ask it."

"Glorificamus!" ejaculated Bet, "where's my notebook, to dot that down—or a stick, to make a notch? I'm blest if it wasn't the very first chance, then, that ever *he* let slip."

"You are much mistaken," said Honor, with a displeased light in her eyes, which served in a measure to dry her tears—a result highly satisfactory to her companion—"he has never kissed me in all his life."

"Oh, ye saints and little fishes! THERE'S a story!" exclaimed Bet, rolling her strange eyes up to the ceiling, and then round to the door—which was ever so little ajar. "Well, never mind, my dear; it isn't any particular matter—only he's a greater goose than I thought him; that's all. And so he's never coming back any more, did you say? Dear me!"

"Never! or, at least, not while I am here. Perhaps"—very dismally—"when something occurs to take me away, he may come again."

"Of course he will," said Bet, with an extraordinary chuckle, which sounded like a fowl in distress, and dusting Honor all

over as though she were a statue—to the serious detriment of her sable garments, and the complete mystification of Sancho, who whined uneasily around, and made snaps at the duster whenever a corner of it happened to hang in his way. “No doubt at all about his coming then : very frequently, too, I should say. Well, a pretty kettle of fish you’ve given me to cook this evening—the pair o’ ye ! I wonder would anything in this world teach women wisdom ? There they go, every day, making love by the yard, and having it made to them, and just as things are at fair-weather point they get up the storm-signal : for nothing on earth, too, but ‘ the pure cussedness of it,’ as the Yankces say. Come along and sit down here, and don’ tbe a baby any more. I hate tears, as his majesty of the cloven foot hates holy water, and gracious knows there’s wet enough outside, without having an extra supply of it indoors.”

She sat down with a lurch, and drew Honor to a place beside her.

“ Now, let’s have the whole complete story of this falling out,” she exclaimed, giving the bathing-cap a fierce cock, and squaring her elbows as if prepared to fight—“ because it must have had a beginning, somehow or another. Tell me *all* about it, this minute.”

“ I—really—cannot—tell you anything at all, while you talk in that strange way,” murmured Honor, looking scared. “ You are so unlike yourself—so very unlike, at least what you are to *me*.”

“ Oh, never mind that,” said Bet, quickly, and throwing a rapid glance at the partially open door—“ I’ve got a touch of liver to-day—often have this time of year—but I don’t mean to be cross with you : not a bit of it. Here, come close to me, if you’re not afraid of pins, and tell me how this trouble came about.”

And Honor came close, very close indeed, to that seemingly repellant, and yet most faithful breast—and told the history of her folly, and the consequences it had entailed—a dismal story enough, it seemed, interrupted often by her own sobbings, but by never a word from Bet.

When she had finished, her companion said —

“ Well, you’ve played the fool for once, my dear, and must, of course, suffer for it ; but I’m very sorry for you, all the same. I warned you against believing one word the Step said about Derrick, and told you to take him if he asked you ; so you see you’ve only got yourself to blame, and if——”

"But he never *did* ask me, and how could I know whether or not he was really serious?" interrupted Honor, lifting a very wet and miserable face from the bosom on which it had been hidden. "We have been all this whole week together—and much of it alone, too, thanks to you—yet he never, until to-day, said a word to lead me to suppose that he cared in the least about parting from me."

"Quite right," said Bet, sagely; "wise man. He was waiting his time to find out whether you were in earnest about him, or only flirting. That was his policy, but you took it into your head that he was merely dallying for his amusement, and so made it your business to snub him in the end. You've done it to such good purpose, too, that you've driven him away altogether. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Honor's drooped head and shrinking form looked as though she were very much so indeed.

"And aren't you sorry for what you've done?" went on Bet, puckering her face into every conceivable shape, and twisting her eyes until they seemed as though they would never come right again. "Wouldn't you give a lot if you hadn't been such a young Turk, eh? Wouldn't you, now?"

"I would give all the world," murmured Honor, disconsolately. "But where is the use of reproaching me? My self-condemnation is quite enough."

"I want to make you real right-down repentant," said Bet, rubbing her ear with the duster till it blushed and shone. "If you were a child I'd whip you, that's just what I'd do. Only fancy now, what you have done to that man. Ruined him! nothing less."

"Oh, no, please don't say that," pleaded poor Honor, ready to cry again, yet positively startled out of her inclination to do so by the extraordinary grimaces that Bet was making.

"Oh, yes, you have, though," was the reply, "we all know what men do when they're crossed—either engage a box-seat for the downward road, or go out among the Zulus, and improve on their airy costume by the addition of a paper collar and a pair of spurs. Think of that! There's nothing like facing one's misdeeds, is there?"

Honor, too wretched to speak, hid her head amongst the sofa cushions, from whence Sancho—thinking she meant play—proceeded first to root it out with his nose, and then began barking, to show that he was thoroughly alive to the situation.

"If you don't mind my telling you," said Bet, demurely, when

she had restored order by dragging her companion into a sitting posture, and tying the duster round Sancho's head. "I don't believe Derrick will actually secure the box-seat that I spoke about; that would be a trifle fast for him. No; he'll walk the broad way quietly, with Lady Kissie by his side! She's been angling after him this long while, and of course he'll let himself be hooked, now that you have thrown him over."

This was just the one drop too much for Honor's embittered cup. She rose up, tearless and trembling.

"Let me go to my room," she said. "I cannot bear this. Were he capable of doing what you say, I should have little cause to regret what *I* have done this evening."

She was moving loftily to the door, but Bet seized her ere she could reach it, and placed herself between.

"Well, I'll promise that he sha'n't," she said, hurriedly, "if you'll only say that you are *sorry* for what you've done."

"I am sorry—very sorry," Honor answered, standing pale and impassive in the sombre light. "How could I be otherwise? Let me go!"

"And you wouldn't do the same again, if a like chance were to offer?" queried Bet, giving the bathing-cap an extra knowing shake.

"To him, no; to all others, yes," was the steady reply.

"In short, if he were to come back here to-night, you'd be ready to ask his forgiveness, and confess yourself in the wrong?"

"I certainly should," replied Honor, a great but ecstatic fear creeping over her, which even to herself she dared not confess. "Why do you question me in so strange a way?—and has that door been unclosed ever since you came in?"

"Well, I suspect it has," responded Bet, with a knowing smile, "and, if you want to know why I'm questioning you, it's because there's a particular friend o' mine just outside who would, I thought, be interested in your answers; but I told him that if he dared move from where I placed him—even so much as to sneeze—I'd throw up the sponge at once. Ho there, my lord chamberlain! Come in!"

Flinging wide the door, she drew forward Derrick, his handsome, manly face one glow of pleasure, yet not without a certain shyness mingled with all its joy.

"He'll be late for Chatham, my dear, if you delay him an instant!" exclaimed Bet, wagging her strangely-adorned head in an excess of facetious mirth, "for *I* have made him miss one

train already by laying hold of him in the hall and compelling him to tell me his secrets, whether he liked it or not. Now, sit down, the pair of ye, and have it all out at once—with Sankey to give ye his blessing!" And with an elfish laugh, which sounded as though it began below the lines and ran all up the scale, she kissed her hand to each separately, and bounced out of the room, shutting the door noisily behind her.

Abashed and silent in presence of the man she so dearly loved, Honor stood like a tall pale lily, her sable garments serving to render still more conspicuous the marble whiteness of her complexion—her drooped head speaking her contrition, the nervous interlacing of her fingers expressing her tangled thoughts; a beautiful yet touching picture of womanly helplessness and love.

Derrick paused for but an instant, to feast his vision, ere he seized her hands and drew her forwards into the clearer light. Her face—wet yet joyful, like an April day—was an assurance, if such were needed, of all he had so longed to know. She trembled excessively, and her eyes—lifted for a moment to his—drooped beneath the passionate gaze which they encountered.

"Is there nothing that can bring back *time*?" were the first words he uttered; "we have lost so much of it, you and I, through misunderstanding one another. Oh, my own love, how nearly had our cross-purposes brought us endless separation and sorrow."

The hands he was holding he laid about his neck, and prisoned her sweet body with his arms; but she struggled from his embrace with a vivid flush.

"You are vexed by my freedom," he cried; "heaven knows you need not be. Why should you? I ask you to let me take you to me—hold you to my heart—for life, for ever, to be the one beloved thing for which I shall henceforth live. Come back to me, oh, my darling! I would not offend you. I offer you all I can give. Must I wait long for my answer?"

Not long; yet not at once did it come. She drew nearer to him, suffered him to take her passive hands once more in his, but still kept resolutely apart. The joy of heaven was on her pure face, and yet a look of pain flitted across it also.

"Your mother," she murmured, "have you thought of her, and that I have nothing—no position, now—as——"

"My mother," he answered, interrupting her, "does not guide my actions, or interfere with what I choose to do. She leaves me my will and way, as she has hers. In my marriage I shall please myself, as she did. As to your possessions, I have not

coveted any. I want but one thing from you: your love. I know, from what I have overheard, that that is mine already. Give me your confidence with it, and I shall be well content. I would not then give my riches for all the world's so-called wealth."

"And have you ever reflected," asked Honor, demurely—suffering him to draw her a little closer, but still managing to keep pretty well aloof—"that you will have to take me with you always—wherever you may go—to India, China, *everywhere*? I shall not consent to be left behind."

"You shall be with me always and always; never absent from my side," he passionately answered. "Oh, my one love, my beautiful sweetheart. When, *when* are you going to give me a kiss?"

She did not resist him longer. Why, indeed, should one resist a new and actual and most perfect happiness, such as comes to barren hearts like a sprinkling of heavenly rain upon dry and thirsty ground. Lifting her pure, sweet mouth to his, their lips met, made first acquaintance, in a long, passionate, interminable kiss. Met lovingly, clung lingeringly, parted grudgingly, only to meet again in a still longer and closer pressure, as though loth to separate, even so soon.

In a guileless tumult of complete and unalloyed bliss, Honor relinquished herself to her lover's endearments. To her the sensation was one hitherto absolutely unknown; to him, well—not quite that, perhaps, or so altogether guileless either, but sufficiently sweet and overpowering to make him regard earth as a temporary elysium, and heaven a place which surrounded his beloved, and formed the atmosphere wherein she dwelt.

Forgetful of the flight of time—of the gathering shadows—of the hour (rapidly hastening on) of Mrs. Blount's return—unmindful of Victoria Station, of Chatham, of neglected duty and possible reprimand—unthinking even of the girl to whose thoughtfulness and *finesse* all this new-found happiness was due—they sat down, side by side, in the lovely silence of perfect beatitude and peace.

Oh, if there is one thing that makes love a god, it is the knowledge that in the midst of this breathing world he reigns aloof and alone, and that those who are occupied with his worship feel nothing of the pettiness, the strife, the bustle, which pollute and agitate the ordinary inhabitants of earth. What were now to them—as with clasp of hands and touch of lips they compressed life into moments—the things which had

engrossed them before they met and loved! In Honor the recollections of grief, humiliation, pain, and care subsided; she was sensible of but one thought: the presence of the being who was beside her,

“That ocean to the rivers of her soul.”

And he? With mind full of ecstatic rapture, he forgot time, place, everything, but the woman he loved; while mingled with her image were thoughts of the bright climates beneath which he designed that, so far as was possible, their future home should be: where the very air was music, and the light like the colourings of love. Her soft breathings upon his cheek he compared in fancy with the sweet breezes from flower-filled valleys, such as he meant she should know and enjoy with him abroad, and associated their sighs of mutual blessedness with the fragrance of myrtles and the breath of a Tuscan heaven.

Time glided by. The rain ceased, the clouds uplifted, a subdued and melancholy light stole through the curtained windows, shedding a corresponding influence over all within the room. Yet, it was far from being unlovely. The melancholy which arises from no cause actually within ourselves, is like music. It enchants us, in proportion as it affects our feelings, and they can be but little sullied and worn whilst able to respond to the mysterious influences and sympathies of Nature. In all such hours there is a sadness (if such it may be called) mingled closely with our pleasure, but so void of bitterness is it, so allied to the best and most delicious sensations we enjoy, that there is indeed little difficulty in believing that the very happiness of heaven partakes rather of melancholy than of mirth.

They sat on—these two—through the blissful moments; heart pressed close to heart, soul answering soul, in that first awakening to life's fairest day; and while they so lingered, while Honor, in innocent *abandon*, forgot reserve, and suffered her love's unwearied caresses, a forlorn form lay stretched in a room above them, prone upon the floor, with hands pressed upon bleared and burning eyeballs, and a cry of bitter desolation going up from a stricken heart.

Are there many such? Alas, yes! Their griefs are never known, nor is consolation offered them. They move, like the delineation of Faith, over a barren and desert soil. The rock, the thorn, and the sting of the adder are under their feet; but they clasp, in secret, the cross for their comfort, and fix their eyes upon the heavens for their hope.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALL through that long summer night Honor lay blissfully awake, looking her new-found happiness shyly, but joyfully, in the face. Too glad-hearted to sleep—too jealous of the precious hours to suffer even one of them to glide away in oblivion—she lay with curtains drawn back and blinds uplifted, that she might watch the face of the sky and mark the first streak of the coming dawn.

The rain had long since entirely ceased. Night, with her pomp of light and shade, reigned peacefully over the earth. The moon waxed high in her career. It was midnight—that beautiful and mystic hour, blent ever with a thousand memories for each of us, hallowed by a thousand dreams, made tender to remembrance by thoughts of vows breathed beneath its stars, and solemn by the olden legends which are linked to its majesty and peace! the hour in which men should die; the isthmus between two worlds; the climax of the past day; the verge of that which is to come—holding our eyes waking that we cannot sleep, or wrapping us in slumber after a weary travail, and promising us a morrow which, since the first birth of creation, has never failed to come.

The house was very still; unusually so. Colonel Blount had returned that night from Ireland, just late enough not to clash with Derrick, and unaccompanied by Mr. Jessel, who was, he said, to follow in a few days. Small matter was it now to Honor whether the agent went or came. In the fulness of her abundant joy and thanksgiving she could even have welcomed him had it been the latter. Her eyes, blinded by the radiance reflected from her glad young heart, could distinguish no speck upon the horizon, nor see the cloud, as yet no bigger than a man's hand, which was sailing up over her at present undimmed sky. She had welcomed her guardian on his arrival; had kissed him in his study—the room in which her troth had been plighted a few short hours before; had asked a thousand questions con-

cerning Nutley and its surroundings, and received cheery answers to all, ere bidding him an early good-night. The colonel had come home in his pleasantest mood, and had seemed so kind and affectionate that she had more than once thought of opening her heart to him, and telling him of her engagement; but maidenly reserve, coupled with the fact that Derrick had not desired her to do so, made her defer to another time a subject which there really appeared no necessity for making immediately known. And so she had remained silent, and had taken her secret to bed with her, to nurse and cherish it through the deliciously silent hours of the witching night.

Mrs. Blount, having succeeded in "hunting-up" Lady Kissie, had brought that erratic beauty back to dinner, all pearls and pearl-powder, smiles and wiles, and had subsequently taken her away in her brougham, driving off to the appropriate tune of "We won't go home till morning," droned forth by a street-organ, as the two ladies drew up the windows to exclude every breath of air, and bowed away to participate in the orgies in which their unhallowed souls delighted.

Bet had been in a marvellously gay mood throughout the entire evening. She had come down to dinner in green spectacles and a purple gown, and had uttered so many smart and racy sayings during the progress of the meal that Honor had indulged in a constant stream of rippling laughter, while even her non-admirer, Lady Kissie, had felt once or twice constrained to smile, and had actually given vent to one unwonted little laugh (the fun this time not being at her own expense), which had somewhat damaged the enamel of her face, and necessitated a half-hour's retirement to Mrs. Blount's dressing-room for the purpose of touching-up.

Altogether, things had been remarkably happy and pleasant; and as Honor lay awake, thinking how much brighter the world had lately grown, moments and hours glided rapidly away, and the first faint and gradual breath of the summer dawn stole upon her, as it were, unawares. She quitted her bed, and looked out. The stars had not left the sky, or the birds their nests; all was still, hushed, and tranquil—but how different the tranquillity of reviving day from the solemn repose of night! Although, in the silence of both, there is music that is capable of a thousand variations.

Feeling as though she could no longer remain inactive, but must be up and doing—even though no duty called, or un-

wanted pleasure tempted—the girl dressed leisurely, and, softly opening her door, glided out into the corridor.

Oh, for Nutley now, with its delicious freedom! for one breath of its pure, flower-laden air! one hour of blissful wandering through its grassy fields! It seemed hard that her impatient feet should be detained within the narrow limits of a town abode—that she could not even wander across the park, so very nigh at hand, without violating all the world's ideas of decorum. No hope, however, of such enjoyment; and so she made up her mind to rest contented with a stroll through the house and its surroundings, taking Sancho for a companion.

Having descended three flights of stairs, the unmistakable sound of voices smote her ear. She was not, then, the only one awake; the pleasure-seekers had doubtless returned, and were probably discussing their gains, or losses, as the case might be, in some room below her. The hypothesis was, however, soon overthrown; the tones were not those of Lady Kissie, or of Mrs. Blount; it was her guardian's voice which, to her surprise, she heard, in conversation with somebody upon the landing beneath that on which she had paused.

"To-morrow, then," he was saying, "or rather to-day, send round that note you were talking to me about, and I will see that it is answered as you wish."

"I should certainly not like to be refused," said, in low but firm tones, a voice which she recognized only too well; "but if, as you say, you can ensure——"

"You shall *not* be refused," said Colonel Blount, confidently; and then followed a short, whispered colloquy, in the course of which Mrs. Westonbury's name was mentioned, and also another which Honor did not know.

All the girl's enchanting visions of love and happiness faded into indistinctness; her heart stood ominously still; her young warm blood seemed turned to ice. She stood irresolute—bewildered—uncertain whether to advance or retreat—and in that moment Sir Tittleum Tibbs went downstairs, and her guardian returned to the card-room, at the door of which they had evidently been conversing.

Other voices she then heard, speaking in muffled tones within, and presently forms passed out, descended the staircase—and, after a brief delay in the hall, went softly into the street.

A clock struck four. Play at such an hour! The thought chilled and shocked her, and with it came the recollection that

Colonel Blount would probably now be returning to his late rest, and that she was at the moment right in his path. She turned to go, and, as she did so, Bet came stealing hurriedly up the staircase, two steps at a time—yawning desperately, and thrusting the green spectacles away in her pocket.

They confronted one another in silence; each too astonished to speak, or perhaps not wishing to do so where they could be overheard. Honor drew her friend within the door of her own chamber, and there questioned her.

"It's nothing, I tell you; nothing at all unusual, I mean," said Bet, quietly; "some people playing poker, that's all. Mrs. Blount is in, and she loves the game; but they have all gone away now. *Late*, did you say? Oh, no! Not late for that kind of thing. I often don't get to bed until seven."

"Until seven!" repeated Honor, aghast that such unheard of dissipation should stand confessed. "You surely do not play?"

Bet hung her head.

"No; but I never leave my father, so long as he allows me to stay with him. Now, about this other affair—the letter business that you say you heard talked of. I am not one bit surprised; in fact I have been expecting it every day—was looking out for it long ago—but Sir Tittleum is evidently a laggard in love. He has, I am confident, been only spurred up to it in the end through fear lest Derrick should have scored honours while his own cards were still unplayed. A little bit of jealous pique has at length brought him to the point! But why *you* should be down-hearted, I don't know. Sir Tittleum is a gentleman; he won't want to marry you against your will. Besides, your word is now pledged to another, you cannot draw back, even were it your wish. Did I not tell you, days ago, to be prepared for this?"

"Yes, but I wish he had put it further off, even for a little, and not hurried it on just now. Was there ever *any* happiness without an immediate cloud?"

"Never," answered Bet, sitting down on the spectacles and bringing them to speedy grief. "There's a deal more bitter in the world than sweet, my dear, but we needn't squeeze in an extra drop of gall for ourselves."

"No, certainly not, but this will cause unpleasantness, and at once, too, whereas I was in hopes of escaping it altogether, or at all events of putting it off for awhile." And Honor, in great

perplexity, sat down upon her bedside, and leaned a thoughtful head upon her hand.

"Putting it off!" repeated Bet, jumping up, and arranging Sancho's sleeping-rug; "that's cowardly; much better face it at once. You'd have had to tell them all about Derrick in a day or two, or leave him to do it, and either way there was sure to be a row; so it is just as well, *I* think, to have the whole thing over at one go."

"There will be *great* displeasure about it!" murmured Honor, in a shrinking tone. "I know how much your father is in favour of—of—this other unfortunate proposal, and I cannot bear to offend him; he is so very good to me."

Bet looked fixedly at the rug she was seemingly engaged in settling; and Honor, who was gazing at her, perceived that something like a spasm ran over her face. Presently she rose up and laid firm hands upon her companion's shoulders.

"Look here, child!" she said, solemnly. "The world is full of *real* sacrifices, and chock full of sham ones; I mean novelists' accounts of such things. Don't you attempt to add another to the number! My father is nothing to *you*, that you should consult his wishes. Were it I, it would of course be different, but you are not his child—no relation, in fact—nor are you under any compliment or obligation in life to him. Bear this in mind, and keep your faith with Derrick, whatever way the wind blows. Now, I'm half asleep, so good night—or, rather, good morning! The sun is positively coming out!"

In the forenoon of that day, after a late breakfast, Colonel Blount took Honor for a ride; and the girl, her heart filled with mingled joy and apprehension, waited in momentary expectation of some allusion to the subject which, in conjunction with another and happier one, occupied her entire thoughts. Not a word, however, did he say concerning it, and after the first half-hour or so she breathed more freely, while with the elasticity of youth, her spirits rose in proportion as the weight which was oppressing them seemed to be partially removed. Never had her guardian appeared more gracious and affectionate; consequently never had he seemed to more advantage—for he was a man on whom kindness sat well.

In the park they met Lady Kissie, unaccompanied, for a wonder, save by a groom; so she joined them, and returned for luncheon.

They found two ladies sitting with Mrs. Blount. One of

these, the taller, was Mrs. Westonbury, looking remarkably handsome in a suit of silver-grey tweed, with waistcoat of amber satin, and cap to correspond. The other, on first coming in, Honor took to be a man. She was of medium size and stoutness, with rather a bull-dog type of face, and no complexion save that which a pan of cold lard might be said to possess. Her hair was cropped so perfectly short that curling could not possibly have been attempted. She wore an abbreviated skirt of dark cloth, with coat-shaped jacket to match; a very high collar was about her neck, set off by a jaunty tie, through which a pin—comprising the letters O and U in silver, with a golden devil at top—was appropriately stuck. She wore long cuffs at her wrists, and a jerry hat on her head, set well back, and carried slightly on one side in an excessively rakish manner. She had what she was wont to call a “nobby little stick” in her ungloved hand, on the little finger of which she wore a signet ring. Her attitude was independent, if not altogether graceful, as she sat sideways upon her chair, her right arm resting over the back of it, the hand drawing patterns upon the carpet with the cane. Her right foot was drawn up on her other knee, her left hand grasping the instep. She had a cigar between her lips; and a battered-looking white dog, with a face uncommonly like her own, was sitting by her side, engaged in licking a fresh wound upon his person, and occasionally growling at Sancho, who, inspired by curiosity concerning the new arrivals, was seated upon his haunches a yard or two distant, cudgelling his canine brains to find out whether the object with the hat was a man or a woman, or one of his own species in disguise.

A woman certainly, and a very well-developed one, too, as was apparent when she rose up to meet the host and his guests. With him and Lady Kissie she seemed perfectly good friends, and sat down in her former attitude to converse with the latter—being presently introduced to Honor as Lady Mog Wickham—a ceremony which she acknowledged by touching her forefinger to her hat.

Bet appeared at luncheon, splendidly attired in flame-coloured cashmere, liberally adorned with cotton lace. She was all oddness and raillery—kept the tortoise in her lap, because she knew the timid Vine possessed a dread of the animal, and made special attacks on that lady, and on Lady Mog: the latter of whom bore them excessively well—in fact, like a man.

"And so you were not out for a ride this morning, Miss Blount?" she said, after parrying a somewhat severe stroke.

"No," answered Bet, offering the remains of her sherry to Lady Mog's dog, and laughing because he drank it; "Pa sold Ramjoggle—a pony of mine—'cause he had no back! At least if he had, I could never find my way to it. I was always on his tail, except when I exchanged that seat for the ground. Fact. I never rode since—except a tricycle. I'm thinking of changing that now, by the way, for a bicycle; you looked so nice on yours, bowling down the Hammersmith Road the other day, with your little pipe in your mouth."

Lady Mog, much gratified, laughed a horse laugh, and chewed a toothpick as she leaned backwards in her chair.

"I wish you'd come and stop with me for a week," she said. "It would be great fun. How do you employ yourself all day?"

"Stealing eggs!" responded Bet, with a goblin-like grin and wink, "or peeling onions! they make me cry so, and keep the water-works in order. Lady Kissie knows all about it; she's a grand hand at extemporizing grief!"

Mog laughed heartily, but the vexed Vine pretended not to hear. She was engaged in full confabulation with Mrs. Westtonbury, describing, in envious terms, the charms of a so-called "new beauty," who had attracted attention that morning in the Row.

"My dear," said her ladyship, "she has no figure in the world! Her waist is twenty-four inches *at least*, and she has one of those flat, meaningless, pink-cheeked, high-browed faces, precisely like——"

"A penny doll!" put in Bet, with ready simile; "wooden joints all perfect, and paint on face not scratched. One penny a-piece, or two for three-ha'pence!"

Lady Kissie, who was seated next the speaker, placed her elbow upon the table to shut her out, and continued her observations.

"I must say she was well-dressed," she reluctantly acknowledged; "though I don't care for seeing a girl *altogether* in black; but her style was good, and her *tournure* absolutely perfect."

"What's that?" queried Bet; "is it the ballast that sticks out behind, and keeps the vessel trim?"

"And her bonnet," continued Lady Kissie, disregarding, "was quite tasteful; jetted lace, with one tiny red rose just above the left temple."

"Like a boil!" muttered Bet, going down four notes of the scale; and Lady Mog roared with laughter.

"I saw Sir Tittleum Tibbs very attentive to her," said the bitter beauty, with a spiteful glance at Honor, who quietly ignored it, "and she seemed gratified too. By the way, I'm told he is giving up his bachelor quarters and is negotiating for Lord Oakton's house in St. James's Square. That looks like meaning something. A lovely house it is! I've been in it. The green drawing-room is quite unique."

"Splendid!" said Bet, rolling her queer eyes with irresistible drollery; "makes you feel when you're there like a pea in a pod."

Mrs. Blount got up impatiently, and there was a general movement to leave the table. Drawing Honor aside, she told her that she had on the previous evening invited Mrs. Westombury and Lady Mog Wickham to come to luncheon and remain for afternoon tea, but had entirely forgotten that she herself would be compelled to go out, and was therefore obliged to ask her (Honor) to entertain them for an hour or so in the drawing-room, until she or Lady Kissie should be able to return and take up the duties she was temporarily obliged to shift.

Nothing in the world could have been more uncongenial to the girl who was pining to get away to her own room, in order to keep a promise of writing a few lines to her new betrothed. Mrs. Blount's desires, however, were in general equal to commands. She accordingly obeyed with what grace she might.

Leaving the room in company with the two ladies, she made an almost imperceptible sign to Bet to come along with them; but at the precise moment Colonel Blount called his daughter to his side, and busied himself in giving her minute directions about something which took a very long time to explain.

Reluctantly Honor went without her; perceiving, as she could not avoid doing, that there appeared to be a plan on foot for leaving her alone in the society of the two uncongenial spirits, whom she was to endeavour to entertain.

As it happened, however, the task so much dreaded was entirely taken up by the other side.

She might have been the guest and they her entertainers, for all that she was required to do. They smoked and laughed, and told stories, chattering incessantly, until Colonel Blount came somewhat unexpectedly and hurriedly in, with a batch of letters in his hand, and saying with brief courtesy that he was sure they would excuse his ward for a moment or two, as he wanted

her to look over and advise him about the contents of some papers which had arrived by the afternoon post, he drew a chair for Honor to the table, and then told the ladies that he wished to show them some changes which he contemplated making in the arrangement of his card-room immediately adjoining, and would, if permitted, escort them thither. They rose and went with him at once, leaving the girl to her task.

It was one not altogether new to her, for of late it had been her guardian's frequent custom to employ her in similar fashion: usually, she thought, for the purpose of having her about himself, for common-sense told her that she was no match for him in shrewdness, and that on half the occasions on which he affected to consult her and to value her judgment and opinion, his own had been previously exercised and made up. Still, if he had no other policy than to keep her by his side, that fact alone was calculated to gratify and flatter, and Honor had always felt proportionately pleased. Hitherto, however, such consultations had been reserved for quiet moments, and had taken place in the study or library, according as Colonel Blount had desired. That he should now have selected this particular time, when she was presumably occupied with his wife's guests, struck her as remarkable; also that he should choose the drawing-room for the scene of her labours, leaving the door of communication palpably ajar, and almost immediately afterwards going out himself by that which opened from the card-room upon the landing.

With ears sharpened by suspicion, Honor easily overheard (as it seemed meant she should) every word that passed between the two who remained in the inner room. That her task soon lay neglected before her was small subject for wonder. There existed no doubt that it had been *intended* she should hear, and should take in the substance of the two ladies' discourse, but it was a matter of extreme improbability that the astute colonel had desired that she should receive quite so much enlightenment concerning himself and his affairs as seemed destined to be the case. Thus is treachery ever repaid by treachery, and the measure we mete is meted to us again.

What Honor overheard was this:—

Lady May. "How jealous Vine Kissie is of this new belle. I believe that woman would poison any one who happened to be younger or better-looking than herself. Was Tibbs ever a beau of hers?"

Mrs. Westonbury. "I fancy not; nothing very serious, at all events. I used to think he would never marry, being 'a rag on every bush,' as the saying goes—but I believe the colonel has actually booked him for Miss Bright."

Lady M. "Really! And is it an engagement?"

Mrs. W. "Not quite, yet; she does not care overmuch about him—but of course that is nothing."

Lady M. "Oh, nothing at all; of course not; but girls are sometimes abominably stiff-necked, and Tibbs has very few attractions to boast. If she chooses to cut up rough, there will be a scene or two over the matter, or I'm much mistaken."

Mrs. W. (significantly). "Yes, but *she won't*. Not for long, at all events. Girls are glad enough of a title—especially when they are beggars, or something similar, and that there are uncertainties about their birth. Besides"—spoken very distinctly—"Colonel Blount has been so unprecedentedly good to her, in every way, that obligation alone should make her obey. In fact, unless she were an actual brute, she could scarcely go against his wishes."

Lady M. (hesitatingly). "True, but I think I can read a good deal of obstinacy in that girl's face. I should not wonder in the least if she were to refuse Sir Tittleum."

Mrs. W. "Well I should, excessively; and really she ought in honour to accept him (this very loud and distinct) after that card trickery I told you of. She helped to cheat the man out of a lot of money—in his own house, too! I was there and saw it. She gave Blount the cue—and some other men also, I hear, for whom he was playing—by some jugglery with gloves. Oakton was present, and detected the whole thing. Of course he told Tibbs; they're great friends; and Tibbs accused the colonel, plump and plain, when he had got me to take *her* out of the room. Then it came out positively that she was in the plan, and, as Tibbs wanted to marry her, he agreed that if Blount would arrange matters after awhile, he would not only refrain from making the thing public, but would actually pay him the whole amount of his winnings. Of course he *had* to pay the others, or Blount and the girl would have been exposed, which would not have done at all. You may be sure Tibbs was got to believe that she knew nothing of what she had assisted in—had been led into it, in fact, like an innocent lamb—and love is both blind and stupid, my dear. He swallowed the whole tale. You see it was a deep-laid scheme of Blount's.

He wanted to kill two birds with one stone ; to make money for himself, and have a double hold over the girl."

Lady M. "By Jove, what a coup ! But, to gain the hold you speak of, he should acknowledge to her that he went in at times for little irregularities, not generally recognized among players. Should he not ?"

Mrs. W. "Certainly, but he does not mind a bit. She would never betray him, and so her knowledge could bring him no harm ; nor is he a man who cares one farthing what anybody thinks of him, so long as he has a purpose to serve. Between ourselves"—this quite low and confidentially—"he is an odious person ! He killed his first wife by unkindness and neglect, because she was ugly—the image of that fright of a daughter of his—red-haired, and all the rest of it. Then he came across the present woman, who was attractive, and accomplished, and rich. All three attributes he utilised as decoys ! in fact, he married her for them. The life they led in India was positively *reckless*. Blount kept open house for all the young subs, and brought them there for the purpose of fleecing them. Then, when they hadn't a rap left, he turned them out. The wife more than helped him. She was handsome enough to attract an entire presidency ; and he easily taught her how to give him the signs at cards. Sometimes it was by music. She had a different air for every card in the pack, and he kept them dotted down on his shirt cuffs, and took a sly peep according as she played. She had a system of telegraphy, too, that was quite wonderful ; could signal for trumps by certain twitches of her fingers, and show an enemy's whole hand by the wriggles of her body while complaining of feeling a draught. They were quite in society, though—as they are here. Wealth always carries the day. Half London would flock to their balls and dinners, if invited ; but they are highly exclusive, and choose their own set."

Lady M. "I suppose it is not universally known that Colonel Blount is unscrupulous about play ? If it were, he would be cut."

Mrs. W. "So he has been, pretty well, too, upon one occasion, which I remember very distinctly ; cut desperately—with a steel fork !"

Lady M. "What do you mean ?"

Mrs. W. (significantly). "Look well at his right hand the first time you can. You will see two white marks on the back

of it. He was caught cheating one night at Aden, and the fellows pinned him to the table with one of the mess carvers. It is a common thing enough, and of course a life-brand as well. Now, I must be off! The future Lady Tibbs is busy this afternoon, and old Judas is not good company. Are you coming?"

They went out, shutting the door noisily behind them, and passed chattering down the staircase.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HONOR sat white and stunned—every feeling, save one of blank misery, driven forth from her outraged soul. The seasons which come to us and depart are renewed again each year; time heals the havoc which he makes; if December destroys, April revives: but man has but one spring, and the desolation of the heart but one winter! With *woman* such desolation is complete.

Moments passed; hours they might have been, for all that the girl felt of the flight of them. With hands clenched dumbly before her, form bowed and drooping, and head bent low upon her breast, she sat the picture of chill despair. What had she done that this should have come upon her—that her name should be bandied from one to another by women such as these, as the coadjutrix of a thief, a felon, a practised and branded cheat—and that he with whom she was thus associated should be none other than her own guardian, the man whom she had honoured, and to whom her soul had gone forth in love and gratitude for what she had deemed his unselfish kindness and disinterested affection towards herself! Now, her eyes were opened to his motives and his worth. Injury—even the deepest—she might and would have willingly pardoned, but deception was the one unsightly thing which was ever most odious in her eyes. It is so with most of us—with all except the very coarsest natures. Wrong, slight, anger, injustice, even cruelties are forgiven, but the sting of treachery leaves an ever-rankling wound. We know, even while we struggle to pardon, that for it there is no oblivion. A melody has gone from our lives, an asp has sprung up amid the flowers of our paradise, and never again may we tread there with the fearlessness of yore. Trust, that sweet and blessed portion which seems the special attribute of youth, and is the one beauty that inexperience owns, has been driven from our hearts, and, like our first progenitors, we go forth, blighted, into a new and unexplored

world, while the gates of our Garden of Eden close behind us—for ever!

A clock close at hand chimed obtrusively, and some doors through the house were heard to open and shut. The noise recalled Honor to her senses. She woke up, as it were, with a start. Her hands—pressed for one moment upon her eyeballs—wandered mechanically amongst the papers which Colonel Blount had commissioned her to look through, a task broken in upon and disturbed by the conversation to which she had been an enforced listener. In their midst was an envelope addressed to herself. The superscription was in her guardian's handwriting, and she hurriedly broke the seal.

A letter lay folded within, wrapped around with a sheet of paper, on which the following words were written:—

“DEAREST HONOR,

“Enclosed you will find a communication which has afforded me very great pleasure. You are fortunate in having made so early a conquest, and I have only to say that the proposal is one of which I most heartily approve, and expect, on your part, immediate acceptance. You will not for a moment think, or believe, that I am in a hurry to banish so bright a blossom from my house. I shall miss you sadly, but the home offered you is not far distant, and there are reasons which render it highly expedient that this marriage should take place. I have hitherto asked nothing from you in return for all that I have endeavoured to do for your good, and for the promotion of your enjoyment; I therefore expect that my wishes with regard to this matter will be respected and fulfilled. I have preferred writing to *speaking* on the subject, and shall come for my answer in an hour from the time I leave this with you.

“Your faithful guardian,

“R. BLOUNT.”

On breaking the seal of the enclosed letter, it proved to be from Sir Tittleum Tibbs, and ran thus:—

“DEAR MISS BRIGHT,

“I send this note under cover to your guardian, whose permission I have sought, and obtained, to address you. You have doubtless anticipated the question I am about to ask, for my attentions were capable of but one interpretation. Will

you be my wife? I fear I am a clumsy wooer, and an abrupt asker of favours. Truth is, I have never asked before, or hitherto cared to woo. I have been able to satisfy Colonel Blount that the position I offer you will be a satisfactory one. To you I have but to say that I love you, and will do all that may lie in my power to make your future life happy—if entrusted to my care. Earnestly hoping for a favourable reply, I am, dear Miss Bright,

“Most faithfully yours,

“TITTLEUM TIBBS.”

Honor glanced at the clock. She had been just an hour alone. Right correctly had he timed her, for, as she turned her head from viewing the dial-plate, he entered, evidently striving to assume a confident air.

The man must have had the courage and effrontery of a lion to have advanced as he did to her side, knowing what she must know of him, and what she, in her own pure guilelessness, must think. Boldness beyond comprehension must he have possessed to have approached her, with the weight on his hardened heart of how he had wronged her—and in face of the look she gave him.

He came forward, coolly enough however, with even a smile upon his thin, dry lips; but she put up her hands and waved him off.

“Don’t come near me! don’t touch me!” she exclaimed, in terrible, though suppressed tones; “don’t speak to me! *I know you*. If what you want is an answer to your letter, I have one ready: you shall not have to wait.” And, hurriedly seizing pen and paper, she wrote the word “NEVER” in firm and most legible characters.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked, testily, all his former self appearing in his crafty and cruel face.

“Meaning!” she repeated, getting up and grasping the back of her chair, which she placed as a barrier between them—“need you ask? Let me beg of you, while I can yet control myself, to leave me alone, to—to—give me an opportunity of escaping what I must otherwise say. Go, or allow me to pass you—one or other.”

“None of your nonsense with *me*, girl,” he said, blusteringly; “I’m a little too old for it. What do you look at me in that way

for? What does it all mean I say?" And he stamped his foot manacingly upon the floor.

"It means," she answered, never flinching in her steady observance of him, "that I at last know you for what you are. God will pardon me if I seem ungrateful for any benefits you have done me, since I was left the beggar I am to-day! Better a thousand times, however, that you had done nothing—that you had left me to fight my own honest way—I could have done it, I suppose, as others had before me—better you had left me to *die*, than brought me here to make me the tool for working out your wicked ends."

He looked at her from beneath his bent brows, all the latent evil that was in his nature welling up to the front as he marked the stern determination in her beautiful passionate face.

"Have done with this high-flown nonsense, he said, gruffly; "it will not do with me. Give it up, and tell me what you mean."

"You can stand there and ask me?" she replied, returning his stare so fixedly, that his eyes, bold though they were, fell beneath the angry blaze of hers. "Do you want me to tell you what you have done—as though you did not know it? Then, since you compel me, listen! You pretended affection for me, to lead me into crime; you showed me mock kindness, to lure me into believing that you really regarded me, and to acquire an influence over me which you meant to use for your own purposes; you traded on my youth and inexperience to make me your partner in guilt, with the twofold object of satisfying your own greed, and placing me in a position which you thought would ensure my marrying the man whom you made me help you to rob! You arranged with him last night, or rather at daybreak this morning, that he was to send this letter"—indicating it with a firm hand—"to your care to-day, to be passed on to me, with certain pressure from yourself to make its effect more sure. You planned with those two women—your *friends*, whom I was told off to entertain—that they should make known to me, indirectly, things which, coward-like, you shrank from telling of yourself, and yet did not blush that they should tell of you.

"Do not interrupt me: I must finish as I have begun. Your worthy wife helped you in this matter, as she has done in others. She bade me keep these women company in the drawing-room: why? Because there was no other place in the house which had another room opening off it, capable of being conveniently

utilized for my enlightenment. Your card-room has served the purpose admirably—as you meant it should. You brought me these papers,” tossing them to him, “with a design to work out the ending of the scheme. Your summoning your lady acquaintances to the adjoining room was the next portion of your plan; their conversation was the most important act in the drama, on which this scene between you and me lets down the drop. Now, you are aware of a good deal that I know, but not quite all. Your friends said more of you than your bargain with them included; they gave me an insight into your character and antecedents which, by the force of awful revelation, has changed me in one half-hour from a girl to a knowing, hating, loathing woman.

“Wait,” she continued, holding up a warning finger; “you shall speak by-and-by, when your turn comes. You forced me to begin, and now I must go on. I need not tell you the hideous story which these women—your friends, I daresay you call them—unfolded in my hearing; you know it already. *They did not spare you*, or lighten the burden of your guilt by so much as a finger. What more have I to say? You can convey to Sir Tittleum Tibbs my thanks for his generous offer, and tell him I cannot accept it. He is a gentleman, and will not press when he knows my feelings with regard to the matter. I have finished. Speak at once if you have anything to say; if not, allow me to pass.”

As he was silent a moment, she essayed to get to the door, but he stood in her way, a sickly smile striving to break through the fury visible in his face, like a quenched sunshaft behind an angry cloud.

“You are only acting,” he said, in a tone meant to be bland. “Girls like a bit of pressing, and you are one with the rest. Come, Honor, be yourself! You do not mean to make me this return for all that I have done for you these weeks past?”

“What have you done?” she asked, folding her arms, and drawing further back, with a terrible sternness upon her young face. “In God’s name, how much am I indebted to you, and I will remember it, and strive to repay?”

“Nonsense!” he said, petulantly; “I want nothing from you, except proper obedience. That I *will* have. Where would you be now, may I ask, if I had not taken you up?”

“*Where!*” she repeated, with bitter emphasis upon the word; “seeking honest bread, by some means or another, for myself—

or, where I wish I were this day, lying in the dear old churchyard at home, where my darling that was taken from me is asleep! Would not either be better than living in splendour on the proceeds of infamy and theft? Look at this dress!" she went on, plucking at her gown with a wild, hysteric smile, "thirty guineas' worth! My Lady Kissie's choice. Look at these chairs—velvet and gold—this carpet, these mirrors, all so magnificent and costly, paid for with the price of blood! Better far to wear cotton, and sit on deal, than enjoy luxuries that sin has provided! Let me go, I am sick to death! I want time to rest—and *think*!"

He was mad with bitter rage against her, but he made one more effort to subdue her by gentle means.

"I believe you *are* ill!" he said, with a poor attempt at tenderness. "Say no more until to-morrow. You will talk differently then. I forgive all the harsh things you have said to me. Come, let us be friends!"

He advanced nearer, and strove to lay his hand upon her; but she shrank from him with inexpressible loathing.

"Don't come *near* me!" she almost shrieked. "If you do, I will open the window, and get—dead or alive—into the street! I cannot breathe longer in the same room with you. Let me go!"

Despite her struggles, he seized her by her arms with his powerful, sinewy hands, and turned her round to face the light, while he stared gloatingly at her.

"I have borne with you—patiently, you will allow—without interrupting your vagaries," he said, with a horrible, metallic coldness in his voice, which was evidently the forerunner of some shivering blow about to be dealt her. "Now it is my turn. I want to tell you that you *SHALL* marry this man! I have pledged my word, and you are *hand-and-glove* with me in some things that have concerned him. You shall accept him; and at once, too. It is so arranged. Let me see if you dare disobey."

He was holding his victim in a clutch of iron, but his grasp was not a whit harder than her face, or less relenting. Not a muscle stirred. She had evidently thrown fear to the winds, and was paying back hardness with flint and steel.

"Do you hear me, or do you heed?" he said, shaking her light body as though it were a reed; "you shall marry as I choose for you; so make the choice your own too."

"I never will," said Honor, white to the lips, but speaking with surprising calmness and force.

"What!" hissed Colonel Blount, between his set teeth, "do you set *me* at defiance?"

"I do," she answered, gazing at him with unflinching eyes; "just as you have set *me*. We are quits."

"You mean to say that you refuse money, title, position—for some absurd whim?"

"I refuse them all—most emphatically; but for what reason is known to myself alone."

"It is not!" he said, in blunt contradiction of her words. "I know it. It is for some mad infatuation about this Deverill! You mean to marry *him*, I suppose, if you can."

She looked at him steadily.

"I do not mean to marry anybody," was her firm reply; and for a single instant—not more—a faint colour flitted across her cheek, as though the spirit within blushed at some thought or recollection which the words called up.

"Yes, you do; you have been carrying on a love-affair with that profligate scapegrace—the cursed hound who meets and thwarts me at every turn!" he cried, with brutal fierceness. "You have: you can't deny it."

"Let me go!" exclaimed Honor, struggling desperately to release her arms, which he still held firmly clutched. "You are a coward to hold me in this way!"

He laughed at her efforts, and only tightened his grasp.

"You think he will marry you," he went on, "but he never will—never! He knows *too much*. The man I designed for you knows nothing, nor ever need; but, even were it otherwise, he would not think himself ruined by it, as the other would, nor throw it in your teeth, as Deverill would be sure to do some day, when he had grown tired of you. Oh, I don't mean anything about the *gambling* business, my dear! Not a bit of it: that is only a trifle. There's something else very much more important. Glare at me, now, and ask me what it is: I may have to tell you before you and I have done, but not yet awhile; it will keep. Now, listen to reason, my caged bird, and don't be a fool any longer. You shall marry as I direct you. My will is law. We shall see who dares break through it."

"We shall!" said Honor, no longer struggling, but standing, with face firmly set, while his cruel fingers still left their marks deep in her flesh.

"Ay, we shall," he repeated, baring every tooth in the hideousness of the smile with which he confronted her.

"Precisely; we shall!" again reiterated Honor, in a tone as determined as his own.

He stared at her in blank amazement. Accustomed to lord it successfully over everybody with whom he came in contact—to receive servility in place of opposition, submission for defiance—he could scarce believe that the courage of this girl was a real thing. He had thought to crush her in the hollow of his hand; he now saw that all his strength, coupled with his artifice, was not sufficient to accomplish it. Instinctively he drew back, livid with rage and disappointment.

"Ha!" he ejaculated, with a gasp, as though surprise had deprived him of breath, "do you *still* defy me?"

"Yes," she answered; "as you do me."

"You positively refuse to obey me?"

"Most positively. You have no longer the smallest influence over me. I owe you no obedience; when I gave it, you abused it, and led me into crime; but, even if I regarded you this moment as I did this morning, and loved you as well, I would never, willingly, consent to a marriage with a man for whom I care nothing."

"*You* care nothing! you! you!" he repeated, with mocking irony. "For God's sake, do you know what you are?"

"Yes," she answered; "I am woman—poor, certainly, but able (except for such sin as you have led me into) to hold up my head with the proudest. I am a lady, and have a right to marry whom I choose—or not at all."

He let go her arms, and flung her from him with a harsh, discordant laugh.

"A lady!" he cried, ironically, "a lady, forsooth! a low-born *bastard*. That's what you are, since you force it from me."

Honor fell back. She put up her hands with a dreadful cry, and besought him to kill her rather than persuade her that what he said was true; and he laughed aloud at her misery, and chuckled, and rubbed his lean hands together, in infinite enjoyment of her woe.

"Aha! aha!" he kept repeating, "I have brought you to your proper level at last, have I? A right good thing, too. There's nothing so humbling as the discovery that we have no right at all to the top rung of the ladder, and have to get down—down—to the very, very lowest step. Aha! you are on your

knees now, my fine lady; are you? I wonder what your ideas about the matter have been all this time back!—that you were a princess in disguise, or a lady with a title, who could not quite make it out, eh? Dear bless me! what a pity to disenchant such charming innocence! *Why*, may I ask, did the late Mr. Bright never tell you who your parents were? Why did he never speak to you about your mother, I should like to know? Because she was too low to name, and her disgrace clung to you, her child. That was why. A common—well I shan't say it: but a woman of her description is not a parent to be proud of. Tell me, if you can—if you dare—that he ever mentioned her to you, or to any one else in your presence. I know better. Tell me I am lying now, if I am. I have the whole history at my fingers' ends—and a pretty one it is, for young minds to study!"

He paused. On her knees, beside a chair—her hands clasping her face, her forlorn figure swaying to and fro with the greatness of her shame and grief—Honor crouched, in humbled and dire sorrow. Her thoughts, all tangled and confused though they were, could go back to every particular of her home life at Nutley, yet could not recall one single instance of anything that would enable her to contradict him. From her infancy, indeed, the subject of her parentage had been as a sealed book. Once or twice she remembered, her childish hand had sought to turn the leaves, but another—kindly, yet firm—had jealously looked to the fastenings and put it away on the shelf, where only mouldy and disused things were lying. She had never been able to open it—never even caught a glimpse of what was within—and Time, the marvel, had gradually laid so thick a coating of dust upon the binding of the forbidden volume that even its existence had by degrees become forgotten—until it had grown into a thing of nought. Now, as though its pages were shown her in a magic mirror, she saw, and knew, what was and always had been there!

Mrs. Blount had known it when she twitted her with "the preceding generation" on the evening when she had told her what a proud man Derrick was, and how he had inherited his father's spirit, as he had his wealth and name. Bet had known it when, on the self-same night, she had turned her pitying face from the questioner, and had answered that she "would rather not speak of these things." Alas, poor Honor! She held up her shaking hands, and implored her tormentor to cease. She

crouched very low at his feet. If he would only spare her, she said, just then, she would go away to her own chamber, and rest for a little while—an hour, perhaps—if he would only, *only* not speak to her for even a short spell of time.

He stooped down, and held her by the shoulders, that he might look gloatingly into her pinched and humbled face. He jeered and ridiculed her misery, and cruelly cast her shame in her teeth.

"Your pride is not quite so high as it was an hour ago, my young friend," he went on; "there's nothing so lowering as stain of birth. You did not know, of course you did not—that the sportsman who broke his neck last April at Groundly Chase, and made me a richer man than I had been before, was your own father. Yes, think of it: your own father! 'My child,' he used to call you, I've been told—ay, his child, truly—in a very back-door sort of way! Ha, ha! aha! ho, ho, ho!" and the owner of Nutley laughed, and wriggled, and clutched with his bony fingers in the air, like a horrible bird of prey.

Honor sprang to her feet. No longer kneeling, but standing erect and passionate, with lips that trembled excessively, and cheeks that flushed, she again confronted her foe.

"Stop! Beware of what you say!" she exclaimed; and he drew back, cowed for a moment by her look and tone. "It is false! Had there been any relationship between him and me, he would have told me. He was truth itself. Oh, God in heaven!" she cried, lifting her eyes and hands together in a paroxysm of uncontrollable feeling. "What new tale is this that I am compelled to listen to?"

"Nothing so very new," muttered Colonel Blount, sulkily. "One or two persons knew it all along. Jessel knows it. I don't speak without certainty, young lady."

Honor paused a moment. She was shaking from head to foot with strong excitement—held resolutely in curb. Her face flushed and paled by turns. She struggled for speech, and brought forth but three words:

"Is this *true*?" she asked, with solemn emphasis.

He waved his hand impatiently.

"Quite true. I can prove it, if you like."

"No need," she replied, something akin to a smile breaking over her varying face; "I am glad—not sorry—for, in such case, I am not the baseborn wretch that you have called me. He never injured anybody; even those who were least his friends. He would not have hurt an enemy had he possessed one."

"What do you mean by all this rhapsody" asked Colonel Blount, suspiciously.

"I mean," she said, with a heavenly light upon her speaking features, "that, if he—my darling—was indeed more nearly connected with me than in his lifetime I ever thought, my mother was not wronged. To her grave she carried her good name—untarnished. Thank God for it! And, when you and she stand to be judged in the last great day, she will go into the Kingdom before *you*, who have tried to make her child believe that she lived and died in shame!"

Rendered furious by the confident tones of her thrilling voice, by the pure light of loving memory upon her face, flushed as it then was with the deep earnestness of her soul, he drew forth a packet of time-discoloured papers, and dashed it passionately upon the table.

"You lie!" he exclaimed; and Honor started as though she had been shot. "If that's the sort 'the Kingdom' you're so glib about is to be made up of, I am not sorry there is little likelihood of *my* ever going there. She was—I say it openly now—a common drab! Look there, if you want to find out something about her, and ask Jessel for the rest. You have brought the knowledge on yourself by your accursed obstinacy. Read, and see what you are."

He pointed with quivering finger to the packet where it lay, soiled and timeworn, and bound securely with red tape; but Honor spurned it from her.

"No need to bring me proofs," she again said, and her voice sounded strangely hollow and changed. "None; I am ready to believe a part of what you say, but not all, not that my dead guardian was my mother's betrayer. Oh, no, no! Not all the angels in the heaven for which he lived could persuade me of the truth of that. And *you*!" she added, turning upon him with sudden and astonishing fierceness; "what are you, that you should be his traducer? What, in God's name, entitles you to rob a dead man of his honour? Have you not got his lands, his riches, all that he prized and left behind? Is it not enough for you, but you must also take away what he valued more than all the rest—his taintless name? Oh, shame on you, shame, *shame*!" And, flinging her arms above her head, she called on dear heaven for help to bear this new and bitterest blow.

"Tush!" muttered Colonel Blount, between his clenched teeth. "You are mad. One would think I was a robber."

“And so you are!” she furiously exclaimed, “one of the worst sort. What are the miserable marauders of a battlefield compared with you? Their thefts are nothing to your hideous plunder! They take only worthless baubles, you the vital part. They creep in the night to perform their evil deeds, yours are done in the broad glare of day! Bastard, as you have called me, I scorn you, with your honest birth—for your trickeries disgrace it! ‘You lie!’ you have said to me. I fling the words back in your teeth, for you have lied *tenfold* against the noble dead. My disgrace I can bear, and can forgive those—whichever they were, God knows—who entailed it on me, but yours is of your own making. I can carry mine, and will, a solitary burden through my henceforth desolate life—none shall share it with me—but yours must leave its stain upon everything that ever your tainted fingers touch! Man, I am above you! My shame is as NOTHING to yours.”

Magnificent in her honest indignation, the girl stood erect before her tyrant, her head loftily upheld, a vivid colour in her usually wan cheeks, her lithe figure drawn up with the firmness and grace of a statue endowed with life. Her superiority over him, and her knowledge of it, appeared in every turn of her haughty carriage. That she triumphed in despising him, every gesture showed.

Fired with ungovernable rage, he struck her twice across the face with his open hand, and, as she reeled backwards beneath the blows, he repeated what he alleged her mother had been, and bade her go and follow in her footsteps.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN hour later a gorgeous chambermaid of the Blount *ménage* heard a vigorous beating upon a door at the top part of the house, and conveying herself and her grandeur thither—with a greater degree of smartness than was usually observable about her movements—found that the noise, a very considerable one, was proceeding from a distant attic, in which sundry trunks and imperials not in use, extra bedding, and other miscellaneous property were usually stowed away.

"Who is there?" gasped the chambermaid, shaking so much that her teeth chattered like a row of magpies, and the morsel of airy finery which served as an apology for a cap vibrated like a butterfly upon the top of her head.

"It's me," said a sepulchral voice from within, while another shower of knocks was dealt impatiently upon the panel. "Let me out, or I'll salt and eat you, without even the relish of young cabbage as a set-off!"

"Lord, is it you, Miss Blount?" ejaculated the terrified abigail, at once recognizing the peculiar style of oratory which the household associated with the family hope. "Are you quite sure it's you?"

"If you don't let me out on the spot, I'll show you to some purpose, when you do, that it's me that's in it!" exclaimed the voice on the other side of the panel; and the tones carried such menace with them that the butterfly quivered again upon its eminence.

"I can't, Miss Blount, there's no key. How did you get in?" exclaimed the quaking chambermaid.

"Through the door," responded Bet, with another pound upon the article in question. "Let me out through it now, or I'll give you something to remember me by. Do you hear me?" and again the hammering was noisily renewed.

"I hear, Miss Blount," screamed the chambermaid through the keyhole; "but how did you fasten yourself in?"

"The door's locked!" yelled Bet in response.

"Then the key must be on the inside, Miss Blount," gasped the afflicted handmaiden.

"No, it ain't; yes, it is; no, it's lost, I've flung it out through the window!" shrieked Bet, executing a war-dance upon the floor inside.

"Lord, she must be gone clean mad," ejaculated the frightened housemaid; and she was bouncing away for assistance when a terrific screech from Bet paralysed her flying footsteps.

"Ain't there keys in the other doors on this landing, you idiot!" she yelled in a voice which for sweetness was comparable to nothing save a file rasping over cast-iron.

The trembling servant responded that there were.

"Well, they'll open this one," screamed the voice. "I know they will. Be quick and let me out."

Some noise and fumbling followed, a key grated clumsily in the lock, and Bet, with impatient hand, flung the door open from the inside with such startling suddenness that the helpless chambermaid—no longer gorgeous, but excessively limp and pale—fell forward into her arms.

"I don't undertake to carry baggage," said Bet, depositing her against the wall, and laughing her inward laugh at the odd vibrations of the butterfly, which was quivering more violently than ever. "Take your nose out of my light, my decent girl, and get up some complexion, or I'll give you three knocks against the rocks of Gibraltar to fasten the colours in you."

And again, going off into an explosion of noiseless mirth, the newly-released captive darted away down-stairs, leaving her releasor to recover as best she might from the effects of her alarm.

A hurried search for Honor resulted in discovering her seated in her own chamber, apparently engaged in writing, for the table was strewn with materials for it, and the ink was wet upon a paper which lay before her, and which she somewhat hurriedly covered up. Her cheeks were deeply flushed, but she seemed perfectly calm, and her eyes, though heavy, were tearless. She rose at once from where she sat, and put her arms about her friend's neck.

"Where have you been, so long away from me?" she asked, very tenderly.

Bet, for all answer, turned her to the light, and closely scrutinized her face.

"What is the matter with you?" she bluntly inquired, answering the question by another; "what ails your cheeks?"

"Nothing worth naming," answered Honor, with a small faint smile: "stooping has, perhaps, reddened them—and I am warm. Do not question me. I am absolutely quite well: so there is no cause for one uneasy look."

"Some one has been annoying you!" said Bet, suspiciously: "those dames you had picketed off on you for entertainment, I suppose? They're not your style, at all, Honor. That Wickham woman only wants a beard to be a man! She is not a great lady either, as she pretends to be; her father was a brewer, and her mother taught riding at Cobbe's; but she says she ought to have a title, by some unacknowledged right, and so she calls herself Lady Mog. Her own 'set' humour her, and lots of people who don't *know* believe in her claim to the prefix. Has she been vexing you? or has the other woman?"

"No. They remained but a short while. I am poor company for strangers."

"Well, Mrs. Blount has been annoying you, perhaps?"

"Indeed, no; I have not seen her."

Bet turned away. Her father's name was upon her lips, but she did not speak it.

"There is something you don't want to tell me," she said, in a low voice.

"Nay, but there is something I want to *hear*," said Honor, banteringly. "Where have you been?"

"Locked up!" answered Bet, shortly.

"You are not serious? By whom?"

"By Mrs. Blount. She lured me up to the attic, under the pretence of looking over some disused house-linen, and when she had me there she locked me in."

"A mistake, probably," said Honor, turning slightly away.

"No, not a bit of it. Her mistakes are of a different sort; but if nobody has tormented you in my absence, I care nothing about it. Did you hear a shot a while ago?"

"Yes, or something like one. I did not much mind."

"What was it? or where did it come from? Was it in the house?" queried Bet.

"I cannot tell. I thought it sounded as though it were outside. Oh, not in the *house*, certainly."

"Just so," said Bet, gravely nodding her untidy head. "It was the grocer higher up blazing away at stray cats. He's an

enemy to pussies. I often hear him emptying his water-pitcher on them at dead of night. What on earth have you been writing so industriously there? I see my own name on one of those sealed-up letters upon the table. What can you have to say to *me*, I wonder, that might not be better spoken? And Derrick! Well, you can't, of course, speak to him except on paper, just now; and Mr. Jessel!—oho! Well, you *have* been doing a correspondence! and Sir Tittleum Tibbs, too, I declare! You see, I am presuming on close acquaintanceship, as the story-books say. Has the proposal, then, actually come? Never mind, dear; don't tell me anything about it until you like, or anything at all unless you quite wish it. I suppose I may take my own letter from among the interesting collection?"

But Honor stayed her hand.

"Not just yet, please," she said, in a low, hurried tone; "by-and-by, perhaps. It will be time enough. You will not mind, I hope—or think me ill-natured?"

Bet laughed.

"Nonsense, child! I'm not the fool they say I am. Where is Sancho? his black hide is generally wandering round your skirts, wherever you are."

Honor started, and looked hurriedly about her.

"I believe I have forgotten him," she remorsefully answered. "Poor fellow! he is certain to be outside."

But he was not—though Bet tried all along the corridor; and although both girls called anxiously to him, he did not appear.

"Let *me* go and look for him; you need not come. He is picking a bone in the kitchen, perhaps, or in the backyard," said Bet, hurriedly; and Honor saw that she looked startled, and that her face had grown suddenly pale. She tried her utmost, by word and gesture, to get off alone upon her search, but Sancho's mistress was too anxious about her pet's safety to consent to remain inactive during the delay.

"Where can he be?" she said, in great perplexity—"I am so accustomed to have him always with me that I never noticed his absence."

"When did you last see him?" inquired Bet, pausing, with her hand upon the balustrade. And Honor strove to think.

"He followed me to the drawing-room after luncheon," she replied, "and lay beside me while those ladies were in the room. Then—then—I cannot remember any more."

"Did you come up here, straight, when they left?" Bet queried.

"No; not quite. I delayed a while below."

"And the dog, of course, was with you. Were you alone, or was anybody else there?"

"Your father was in the room," said Honor—and Bet turned, without another word, and went swiftly down the staircase. Evidently her questioning had pointed to something; she had doubts about the dog's safety—and her manifest, although unacknowledged uneasiness, raised a corresponding feeling in Honor's breast. She followed in ominous silence, for Bet faced round again as she went down, and saying, hurriedly, "Don't call!" continued her way without further speech.

When they had traversed a flight or two, the scout paused—gazed—drew aside her gown—peered over the balustrade—and turned in a scared, irresolute way to where Honor had stopped, close behind her. Never had Bet's face worn so strange a look.

It had changed from white to red—and, from amid its varying hues, her startled eyes looked out like coals of fire.

"Go back!" she said, huskily. "Do not look. I will see to this. Go back, at once."

"I shall not," said Honor, steadily. "What is it that you see? What are you striving to hide?" Her face showed that further effort at concealment would be useless.

Bet gave in at once.

"I see—blood!" she answered. "Some one has been hurt; or something. Don't be frightened! it may not be much."

Clearly she herself was excessively alarmed; all her strivings failed to cover the fact. She pressed her hand upon her heart to quiet its tumultuous beatings. Its natural bravery supported her.

They were standing then upon the second landing—a wide one—from which, by a short passage or corridor, the entrance to the library was approached. Instinctively both glanced in the same direction, with shocked and terrified eyes, down the little carpeted passage-way. The blood-gouts there were larger and fresher—more horribly red and damp—than they had appeared upon the stairs; and Honor, advancing a step or two, and stooping down, saw with an indescribable pang that on the mat, close by the library door, her much-loved pet—in helpless agony—was lying.

In a second she was beside him, kneeling down, and endeavouring to lift his head, while he moaned feebly, and shivered with convulsive pain. His shoulder and forearm were shattered,

and wet with blood; his lustrous ebon coat was red with it; beneath him, as he lay helplessly dying, was an ever-widening crimson pool.

Not a word did they say, the two girls, as side by side they knelt—and fondled, and strove to soothe the wounded and sorely-suffering animal. In the heart of each was a heavy and bitter pain. Both knew whose work it was, but only one the motive. Little did it matter, however, what had led to it; the task of destruction was only too surely accomplished.

Honor's look of horror was terrible to see. Other women would have wept and wailed; she uttered no cry, nor shed a single tear. Her shaking hand, laid first upon her pet's silken head, travelled slowly and caressingly downwards and then back again—moving ever, up and down, back and forth, with a helpless, mechanical motion, while her pitying eyes looked with mournful pathos on the wreck that lay before her. The hapless creature, conscious of her presence, and rewarded by it for the suffering he had endured in dragging himself thus far in a last endeavour to reach her, feebly wagged his tail, and strove to lift his tortured body as she drew his head close to her breast. He fixed his melancholy eyes with human earnestness upon her face, and, with a piteous effort to show contentment that she was near, faintly licked the hand that had nurtured him—and so died.

Oh, is there nothing in the death of our dogs to teach a lesson to us who, in our vaunting pride, proclaim ourselves their masters? Is there no example in the picture which they present to us of faith, fidelity, and love that endureth to the end? Do the eyes, on which the film of death has gathered, convey no lesson of *trust*? They die and are not—but to the last, even to the bitterest end, the eye of their faith is fixed upon the master whom they have striven to serve; his chastisements are forgotten, his discipline passed from sight, nothing remembered save the voice that guided and the hand that fed. Can the same be said of us? and is there, indeed, so vast a superiority in the spirit of man that goeth upward, over that of the beast that “goeth downward to the earth!”

As tenderly as though her burden had been a little child Honor laid it down, and clasped her quivering arms about the neck of the living friend, who knelt beside her in silence tearful and profound. A loving whisper repaid her agitated embrace; and the lingering, earnest kiss which pitying lips pressed close

upon her own told that in weal or woe they would be there to bless and comfort.

Another moment of such sweet sympathy, and Honor's pent-up grief would have found vent in relieving tears. Already her bosom had begun to heave—a blessed moisture had gathered in her burning eyes—a rain of weeping was about to ease her brain, when, lo! the door near which they were kneeling was flung suddenly back upon its hinges, and Colonel Blount, his face ominously set and dark, stood stern and erect in the opening.

In an instant Honor had sprung to her feet, every vestige of sorrow gone from her countenance—nothing there save haughty anger and such defiance as a wounded tigress might hurl back at the hunter who had deprived her of all she most prized. With a gesture of unutterable scorn and wrath she pointed to the lifeless body of her murdered favourite, and then, in an agony of frenzied feeling, tossed her reddened hands above her head, and prayed that there might be meted out to the slayer such measure as—— But Bet's strong young fingers clutched her arm, and were laid firmly upon her lips. The impious prayer was checked ere well begun. She did not complete the sentence, or seek for liberty to do so.

Dashing aside the hand that restrained her, she turned upon her foe a look of such agony and loathing as, despite his effrontery, entered like an iron into his soul; then, reeling like a drunkard from wall to wall of the corridor in which the three were standing, she reached the end of it with outspread hands, and fell, like a log, lifeless upon the floor.

Bet, whose face was very white and drawn, gently strove to raise her, and even her callous persecutor stepped across the body of the slain spaniel, and stooped—shamed at last into feeling—to lend an assisting hand.

Together they looked upon her countenance; a single glance was sufficient; it was hushed, proud, passionless—a seal as of death was upon it.

“You might have spared her, *father*. She was an orphan!” was all his daughter said.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LADY KISSIE was in the summer-house at Vine Villa. Being leafy June, the sylvan retreat was abundantly covered with picturesque creepers, and the array of insects usually harboured therein had not yet become unendurable. Altogether it was a desirable spot, and one which her ladyship saw much occasion for frequenting throughout the rosy month of the year.

There she sat, a touching picture of lonely widowhood, with the wadded tea-gown wrapped neatly about her small person—the shawl spread beneath her on the seat to ward off the possibility of damp—the customary footstool to preserve her feet from chills—and the tiny silver tea-service glittering temptingly upon a table in front of her, precisely as described in the early pages of this history, on her ladyship's first introduction to the reader. Even the copy of Swinburne was not missing from its place, and on a mat by her side lay the unappreciated pug—tolerated because it was the fashion for ladies to affect animals of his breed, but not in any way loved, and only tolerant of his tyrannical mistress because he belonged to a race which is a pattern to the human one in long-suffering and willingness to forgive.

From the perch which the beauty occupied she could command the charming house in which she resided; could also see the diminutive garden and tennis-ground, and the pretty little greenhouse, with the unprofitable vine—her own image and namesake—trailing all about it; could discern, too, very distinctly, the pet rose-bush upon which she counted the glowing treasures every morning, while they lasted, to make sure that the mistrusted page had not purloined any of them to decorate his vulgar little sweetheart. They were wanted for her own aristocratic ones; therefore no pilfering was on any account permitted.

It so happened that Lady Kissie was in high good humour—a thing that was by no means continuously the case. Matters

had somehow been going well with her of late. She had won a big thing on the Derby, and not lost more than the half of it at cards. She had wormed a great secret out of one diplomatist, and sold it profitably to another; had played whist against Zelleford, and won; had backed her luck the previous night at poker—had “bluffed,” “doubled the *ante*,” and won the entire pool; had received an unexpected packet of valuables (an extra one, found labelled for her) from among young Crawshay’s effects; had attracted a wealthy admirer, and got successfully rid of a fleeced one; had seen her principal rival discomfited at sight of more costly finery upon her own person; had heard that the new belle—as described to Mrs. Blount—was decidedly *not* a success; had discovered a novel face-bloom, and invented a new *plat*; had destroyed her friend’s reputation, and decoyed her enemy’s cook; had triumphantly persuaded Father Friarly that all her spare moments were passed at the neighbouring hospice for the dying, and given General Gendarme to understand that she had ample time at her disposal for the acceptance of *déjeûners* and dinners of the right sort. She had matched the pug against a weakly Maltese with only one lung, and had seen the enemy beaten off the field; had hushed up an impending scandal which might have involved herself; had found out in time that she was putting two love-letters into wrong envelopes; had prevented two jealous swains from coming in contact, and so saved chaos and strong words; had picked a hole in an immaculate neighbour; had received a polite note from Mr. Jessel, *almost* accepting her pressing invitation to grant her a day at Vine Villa during his projected visit to town; had heard that there was no chance of the antivivisectionists gaining a triumph; had found a decided improvement in the page’s adaptability for lying (on her account) on occasion—the occasion being very frequent; had staved off a big bill with a paltry five-pound note; had received a cheery communication from Mrs. Blount, conveying the satisfactory intelligence that all was chaos at Grosvenor Place, and that she, the fair Helen, was coming round that very afternoon to relate the particulars concerning it; and, lastly—and this was a most superlatively delicious tit-bit—she had stolen a friend’s lover!—a triumph more complete than any she had ever yet been able to accomplish. To win such over from an enemy was as nothing: she was doing that sort of thing pretty nearly every day of her life; but from her own familiar friend, who trusted in her!—there was the enrap-

turing part of it. It did not matter in the least that two lives were utterly spoilt for *her* vagary—that one heart, the woman's, was destined to break from sorrow and disappointed hope, and another, the man's, from subsequent remorse.

It mattered not one particle, either, that falsehood, deceit, and the most unworthy devices had to be resorted to in order to accomplish the desired end. What cared she for such trifles? She had her amusement and her triumph; her boast that "she could bring any man living to her feet" remained intact—most gloriously fulfilled. When she wearied of the man, she could throw him aside; and, as for the woman, she would never suspect who it was that had wrought the mischief, so long as she was still addressed as "dear" and "darling," and was made welcome at the villa, and dosed with stories, to act as blinds, concerning a military lover of the beauteous Vine's, who was absent in India or Africa, or away at the North Pole, and whose portraits in uniform were scattered broadcast all over the pretty suburban dwelling, commencing at the little drawing-room, where they ornamented wall, writing-table, and piano, and terminating at Lady Kissie's sleeping apartment, where an extra large one—velvet-framed and dashing—was suspended right over her ladyship's private altar, in readiness to be worshipped in conjunction with other sacred things. Said altar was, by the way, composed of somewhat slender materials: a deal board, originally square and bare, but somewhat beautified in shape by the carpenter's art, and hung about and ornamented with a goodly supply of white book-muslin and cotton lace. On it were flowers, fineries, and fripperies of every description, together with a prayer-book which was never read.

It was very sweet and comforting, no doubt, to have an altar, even of a nondescript nature, in such close proximity to the couch whereon the worshipper rested; and Lady Kissie kept her shoes under it, and her boots beside it, and a rod behind it—not in imitation of that of Moses, by the use of which the patriarch did so many wonderful works, but a stout birch, horribly hard, and terribly tough and wiry, with which to whack the pug whenever duty or inclination prompted a bestowal of the punishment. It was very nice, too, to have it—the altar—looking so sweet and pretty, with a little carpet before it whereon to stand, and a little stool in front of it whereon to kneel, for Lady Kissie was of a decidedly pious turn of mind, and never failed to say her prayers before retiring to rest; that is, she

went through a certain formula on the first day of the week, and said "ditto" on the remaining six—which was expressive and concise. This was the extent of her worship, except when, not happening to have any Sabbath breakfast-party at her own house, or any to go to, she amused herself by trotting off late to a fashionable church, and sending shafts from the fowling-pieces at every good-looking man on whom her reverent eyes chanced to alight.

Very dainty and smiling she looked now—and sweetly innocent, likewise—awaiting the coming of Mrs. Blount, with a Dresden tea-cup in her pretty hand, and a lily-white napkin outspread upon her lap to catch the crumbs from her bread-and-butter, and a terrible daddy-long-legs thrusting three spindles down the neck-frill at the back of her gown, in awful contemplation and uncertainty as to whether or not he should eventually make up his mind to explore further.

Presently the page appeared, and, there being no occasion just then for a display of inventive powers or circumlocutory fencing, announced fairly enough that Mrs. Blount was coming, which she certainly was, but very slowly, for the day was close and sultry, and her clothing was tight; so tight, in fact, that she creaked as she walked, like a carriage wheel, or door-hinge, sadly in want of lubrication.

So soon as she and Lady Kissie had mingled pearl-powder and embraces, and had "love"-ed and "dearest"-ed one another for ten minutes or thereabouts, each being inwardly delighted to perceive that her dear friend needed more making up than ever, they sat down to talk.

"So you have really been at your wits' end with worry and annoyance, you poor darling, *sweet* thing!" murmured Lady Kissie, in a soft tone, like a coo. "I pity you dreadfully; I really do; but I knew, my love, precisely how it would be from the hour you told me that you were taking that girl into your house. I said then what you had to expect."

"You did," responded the visitor, in mournful accents; "you are always angelic! But what could I do? Blount *would* bring her, and we thought, of course—he and I—that she would have been of some use. A nice hotch-potch he has made *now* of the whole thing! I wish him joy of it."

"Why did he not leave you to manage? I mean to arrange the Tibbs business?" queried the astute Vine, putting her fan to her neck to quell the irritating consequences of her enemy's

researches after knowledge; "it is a great pity that he did not leave the training of her to you."

"Of course it is," acquiesced Mrs. Blount, growing hot at the bare remembrance of opportunities irrevocably lost; "but men are always fools! They can't judge of anything except dinners and cigars! She would be 'more afraid of *him*,' he said—more unwilling to vex him by a refusal. Humph! she has shown it!" and the aggrieved matron leaned exhaustedly back, and unfastened her bonnet-strings to air her wrath.

"And what is this business you wrote to me about the dog?" asked Lady Kissie, who was always tremendously on the alert whenever any question of cruelty was on the *tapis*, and loved to hear about such things when she could not have the satisfaction of looking on.

"Ay, there is another matter!" was the the impatient rejoinder. "I was angry enough, as you know, when the brute was brought from Nutley, and told Blount he ought to have shot it there before ever they started; but I would not, certainly, have done it later on for the purpose of vexing her, or in a fit of rage—as he has done. Look what it has cost, too!—thirty pounds worth of damage to carpets alone. The beast dragged itself up from the yard to the library, and ruined everything on the way! Disgraceful! was it not?—but Blount was always a bad shot, and, what is worse, he seems to care nothing at all about the mischief that has been done in the house. Men have positively no consideration. None whatever!"

And the sensitive partner of the unskilful marksman sniffed her smelling-bottle, and sighed dismally as the recollection of her wrongs.

"The girl has been ill ever since, your letter tells me," observed Lady Kissie, enchanted with the gossip, and still more with the depressing effects of it upon her dear friend.

"Ill!" Mrs. Blount repeated. "I should think so! They thought for hours that she was dead, hunting up doctors, and such a to-do; more fuss, a deal, than she was worth. And now there she is, lying in a horrid fever, raving and screaming, and fancying that she is going to be shot. It is quite awful, I am told."

Lady Kissie could scarcely repress her delight. She rubbed her diminutive hands under cover of the lily-white napkin, and strove hard to keep herself from giving utterance to a crow. Failing entirely in the effort to stifle a gratified smile, she put up her handkerchief and coughed affectedly behind it.

"How very unpleasant, having such ugly things going on in one's house," she observed, with a vain attempt at sympathy; "I suppose you can't help hearing it all, even through shut doors?"

"In the house? hearing it?" ejaculated the perturbed visitor. "Did you say *in the house*? You surely do not suppose I have been mad enough to keep her, with her potions and worry, and doctors and dirt! Not likely. I know something better than that."

"What on earth have you done with her then?" asked Lady Kissie, opening wide her delighted eyes in undisguised curiosity.

"Done?" repeated Mrs. Blount, in a high key; "had her taken out to hospital, to be sure. What else should I do, I'd like to know? I couldn't sit down to nurse her, and be worried with her broths and her bothers from day to day, and professional nurses are more trouble than a whole score of sick folks. It's all very fine for people to talk about things being unfeeling, and unnatural, and so forth! They don't know, my dear! not a bit; ignorant creatures every one of them. For my own part, I abhor illness in every shape and form. I hate cripples, and imbeciles, and all such things; and as for fever patients! one yell from them would send me flying out of my skin. I know it would."

"I think you are perfectly right," said Lady Kissie, approvingly; "why should you be tormented with her? You are at expense enough, I suppose, having her in a pay-ward, and all——"

"Oh, she is in no such thing," exclaimed Mrs. Blount, sharply; "I didn't give any orders to have *that* done. Why should I? What can it possibly matter to a fever-case whether or not there is one of small-pox, or any other odious thing, beside it? One is as bad as the other, and both are too horrid to talk about!" And the fastidious lady unhooked a fan from her waistband, and waived it with a disgusted air.

Lady Kissie pondered a while in contemplation of her friend's substantial charms.

"You are a perfect dictionary of wisdom," she said, admiringly. "The girl, as you say, would not be one bit better off in a private ward, and perhaps—who knows?—she may not recover at all. A right good thing for you if she did not."

"Oh, about that—I don't know," returned Mrs. Blount, with a little deprecatory snort: "I don't profess to love her exactly,

but I always do my duty. If she dies, it will not be through any fault of mine."

"Certainly not, dear," acquiesced her ladyship, comfortingly; "but how do you contrive to hear about her? I suppose you call?"

"Indeed, I do nothing of ~~the~~ kind," was the terse retort. "Call *there*! What are you thinking about? I should have a fit at the door."

"Ah, poor dear!" sighed Lady Kissie, producing cigarettes; "they *are* awful places, I fancy. Of course I know nothing of them except by hearsay." And she puffed away, in happy unconsciousness of having made a confession which gave the lie direct to her alleged frequent visits to the hospice, and spoke volumes for the veracity of the confidential page. "Is anybody with her?" she presently inquired, when both had smoked for some time in silence—"any one from Grosvenor Place I mean?"

"Bet," was the curt response.

Lady Kissie thought it not indecorous to laugh outright at this, and she did so to some purpose, without resorting to either the handkerchief or napkin to conceal her mirth.

"You don't mean it!" she ecstatically exclaimed. "Poor dear Harlequin gone a-nursing! Think of it!" and she fairly chuckled. "Pray, have the green spectacles and the bathing-cap gone along with her, by way of a benefit for the doctors?"

"I don't know anything about it," responded Mrs. Blount, with a testy shrug. "She stops there day and night, and right welcome, too—so far as I am concerned. I wish she would never come back. A stubborn fool—that's what she is! Oh, there's no lack of attention paid, I can assure you. Blount calls every day to inquire, and Jessel arrived this morning, and was off there the very first thing."

Lady Kissie flushed a vivid red, even through her rouge. It was not a pretty, rosy blush, such as sudden surprise or emotion of a pleasurable kind would be likely to call up, but a hot, angry colouring, indicative of wrath, and eminently unbecoming. It did not escape the watchful eyes of the friend who was vigilantly regarding her, and who drew her own inferences therefrom.

"Then he has come to town?" said her ladyship, in a low tone; and forthwith fell to drawing figures upon the tea-cloth with the sticks of her fan.

"Oh, yes, he has come," repeated the friend, with a toss of her head; "and if it is his intention to spend his days in a lazaret-

house he is quite welcome ; but it's very little he'll see of *me*, I can tell him. I have no particular ambition to be nailed up in a box and ticketed for the cemetery. Ugh ! ” and the perturbed lady puffed excessively hard at her cigarette, as though to send all danger of infection away in smoke.

“ I suppose the match with Sir Tittleum is quite off ? ” surmised Lady Kissie, by way of giving a turn to the conversation ; “ of course, I mean in the event of her recovering.”

It was observable that both ladies avoided mentioning the sick girl's name. The elder one gesticulated angrily as her companion uttered the last remark.

“ Do not *talk* to me about it ! ” she irritably exclaimed ; “ it is too vexatious. Nothing could be more mortifying. Such a splendid chance thrown away, just for want of a little proper management. Of *course* it's off. Sir Tittleum is not a man to force himself upon anybody ; he paid a very high compliment, and got a slap in the face by way of return. I'm sure it's the last effort I shall make for her : ungrateful minx ! And *you* were so kind, too, though I'm aware it was for me you did it—dressing her, and taking her to that dance he gave. Oh, dear ! It makes me sick to think of it.” And again the smelling-bottle was in requisition.

Lady Kissie looked knowing, and smiled.

“ I think,” she said, “ the drift of the whole thing was plain enough : a certain Major Deverill was at the bottom of it all. I told you how it was a week ago ; but of course he never would have *married* her.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

Mrs. BLOUNT threw up her lemon-gloved hands.

"Wouldn't he?" she exclaimed. "Men are even greater idiots than you think. My dear, I have not told you half. She was positively engaged to him; nothing less! He had proposed and been accepted. Did you ever hear of such a simpleton in all your life? No wonder you should look upset by it. I was turned topsy-turvy, inside-out, upside-down! Just imagine, with his pride and nonsense; and you know (for I told you long ago) what *she* is. My dear, when he'd come to know it, he'd leave her there, no matter how much married they might be! Designing puss! I saw all along that she was angling for him, but I did not think he was so foolish."

"And how did you find it out?" asked Lady Kissie, with wonderful calmness, considering the perturbation of her soul.

"That is just the cream of the joke," replied Mrs. Blount, laughing despite her anger, for she saw how her dear friend was upset by the news. "I was the first to go into her room, to prepare it for her, and so forth—after the tragedy about the dog—and there, on the table, was a whole posse of letters that she had been writing. Of course I put them in my pocket, and opened them at leisure. She had evidently meant to run away, or do some horrible thing, just for the purpose of disgracing us! There was one to Bet; most affectionate, my dear! 'Good-bye to her darling—never forget her friendship,' and a deal more bosh than I cared to wade through. Another was to Jessel. Evidently *he* had been in her toils!—begged his forgiveness for not answering his last letter—would probably never see him again. As he had always declared it to be in his power to serve her, hoped he would do so by granting 'one little boon;' and then came a touching request that he would look after old Nimrod's grave, and take care of some absurd tree he had planted at Nutley, the day before his death. Quite romantic and sentimental."

"Well, that's enough about it," observed Lady Kissie, sharply. "What other letters did you make away with?"

"There was one to Derrick," replied the spiteful Helen, quite enchanted to perceive that her dear friend was by no means charmed by the announcement. "It was a splendid production—a crowning triumph. I sent *it* on at once."

"To him, you mean?"

"Yes, to him, of course. The reading of it was better than a play. How little women know, when they write such rubbish, that one of their own sex may chance to get hold of it, and not appreciate it quite so well as the man whom it was meant to fool!"

"Full of love nonsense, I suppose? such as she had probably written to fifty other men," exclaimed the vicious Vine. "I wonder you forwarded it."

"I had a reason, my dear, a good one," replied Mrs. Blount, with an enigmatic shake of her head. "It contained a most charming announcement."

"I suppose if you wish to tell me what it was you will do so," said Lady Kissie, with affected carelessness; "and, if you do not, my asking to hear will be of little use."

Mrs. Blount chuckled inwardly. It was balm to her soul that she could thus sway the feelings of her dearest friend. She threw away her cigarette, and said,

"Of course you shall hear all about it. The announcement was—that she regretted her promise to marry him, and was sorry she could not fulfil it."

Her ladyship uttered a low whistle.

"Your letter which I had this morning," she said, "mentioned that Colonel Blount had told her plainly what she was."

"Yes, he fortunately did—though I was angry with him at the time."

"And I suppose she gave it to Deverill as a reason for the break-off, in order to bring him to her side again. An artful trick enough. Of course she knew that a man would think himself in honour bound to marry her when she confessed the truth, and that then, no matter how unhappily things might turn out, he never could cast it up to her. A *very* knowing plan."

"Well, the curious part of it is," returned Mrs. Blount, as though she were making a reluctant admission for the purpose of proving her dear friend in the wrong, "she did not. She gave no reason whatever."

"Do you mean to say she simply broke off without a word of explanation?"

Mrs. Blount bent her head.

"Precisely. That is what she did."

"Oh, the girl's a fool!" exclaimed Lady Kissie, beating her foot impatiently upon the ground—or rather upon the stool on which it rested. "Well, what happened?"

"Not very much. He came tearing up, by the first train, wanting to see her. I was prepared for him, and contrived to keep him and Blount apart. If they met, my dear, a dynamite explosion would be a bagatelle compared with it, and I hate a fuss. As it was, I had him all to myself, and managed it beautifully."

"Oh, good! good! capital! What did you say?" inquired the eager Vine, athirst for further news, and quite ready to worship her dear friend.

Mrs. Blount smiled a complacent smile.

"Well, I told him that it had been all along a settled thing, or nearly so, with Sir Tittleum Tibbs, but that the girl was an arrant flirt, and had accepted *his* proposal for fun, or something like it, but was sorry as soon as he left, and so had written at once to put him off. It worked splendidly! At first he refused to believe me, and wanted to get up a scene; but of course he had her own letter in his pocket—it was no forgery—so he grew more reasonable, and said something about her having shown indifference to him on the night of his proposal, until Bet had somehow brought the thing about."

"I suppose he pretended to be awfully cut-up on account of it?" ventured Lady Kissie, in a tone of mingled jealousy and contempt.

"Oh, dreadfully!" said Mrs. Blount, exaggerating. "Men are such dolts! When I saw how the land lay, I pretended to go upstairs—to fetch her, by the way—and then came back saying she had refused to come down. It was the very best thing I could have done."

"It was; splendid!" cried Lady Kissie, delighted. "But won't he find out?"

"Not a bit of it. He has no idea where she is, and from what I could gather from her letter to him—for of course, I read it through before posting—she has no intention that he ever *shall*. Her mind was evidently made up about that, and she is as obstinate as a mule."

"Then you have absolutely quashed the entire thing?" exclaimed Lady Kissie, in a voice so jubilant that the depressed pug thought it meant good-humour, and ventured upon wagging his tail—an extravagance which very nearly got him into trouble.

"Yes, quite," was the self-satisfied rejoinder. "I had no idea I could dissemble so well. I actually brought him up to the room that used to be hers (having, of course, locked it), and bade him knock at the door, if he chose, and ask her to come to him for a moment. Not an answer could he get; but I had Rybbonds posted inside, to do a little sobbing among the pillows, and to entreat him to go away. He went, too, in double-quick time. I knew he would after that."

So diverted were the two ladies by the success of this praiseworthy device that they not only laughed heartily over it, but became so excessively facetious, that the pug—unused to merriment—saw no indiscretion in giving utterance to a bark, by way of sympathy with the general hilarity, and was rewarded for his pains by a kick from his mistress's sharp heel.

"So you see it is all right, my dear," said Mrs. Blount as she rose to go—creaking again with renewed symptoms of requiring lubrication about the hinges. "A nice disgrace I have just succeeded in warding off. Fancy *my* son marrying a girl like that! It would not have suited in any one way."

"I hope they will not make it up again," said Lady Kissie, with an uneasy shrug. "Bet will let him know where she is. Why did you not lock that girl up? It's not too late yet."

Mrs. Blount shook her head in hopeless dissent.

"No use," she answered, "I often tried it, and she always got out. I believe she could through a keyhole. There won't be a word, however, from *her*, for she does precisely as the other desires. A pair of infatuated fools both of them! No, my dear; my lord and my lady will keep pretty wide apart, I'll warrant, from this time forward."

"And what do you intend to do with 'my lady,' in the event of her coming safe and sound out of hospital?" queried the inquisitive Vine, as she accompanied her visitor through the pleasure-garden towards the house.

Mrs. Blount made an impatient gesture.

"Oh, I have not thought about it. Either take her with us to Scotland, or send her abroad for a year or two. There are always chances going. For instance, Old Farina, at Monte

Carlo, would teach her sense, and make a good thing out of her ; besides going shares, of course, for profits."

"Old F. is not quite honest," said Lady Kissie, sagely. "If the girl recovers, keep her with yourself. It will cost less in the end and be a good bit safer, too. At all events, you can keep your eye upon her then, which you can't do on folks who are hundreds of miles away."

"You are quite right," returned Mrs. Blount, "as you generally are. In fact, I am continually saying that you are the only really sensible woman I have ever known."

And, having given emphatic utterance to this eulogium, the two dear friends paused in the dim recesses of the back hall, and kissed and hugged one another as closely as corsets and cosmetics would permit, to the intense diversion of the truthful page, who stood regarding the proceedings in a covert manner from the glass door in his pantry, shaking so much with suppressed merriment that the cups and glasses, which were his especial charge, shook also, in sympathy, upon their respective shelves.

"Come and see me soon, dear," said the stately Helen, as she sailed majestically along the front hall, her plenteous draperies sweeping out behind her, and her well-developed figure held gracefully erect.

"I will, love," responded Lady Kissie, from the turn of the stairs ; "on Sunday, perhaps."

"Do, darling ; it will be *such* a comfort !" returned her dear friend ; and then she got ostentatiously into her carriage, to the admiration of a dejected nursemaid and two limp children lingering at the gate of the adjoining villa, and was bowled away, town-wards, in the attitude of Helen of Troy.

Six days later two letters were written to Derrick. The first—in a delicate Italian hand, on perfumed, gilt-edged paper—ran thus :—

"Vine Villa, July 1.

"MY DEAR DERRICK,

"Just a line in haste, to tell you that I have got out of going to Scotland with your people, and have taken that pretty little house at Twickenham which you and I were always coveting ; 'Lower Lee' it is called. I heard only three days ago that it was to be had, so lost no time—as you see—in closing upon it, and am actually going there to-day. I shall have some nice people staying with me, and intend getting up

water parties, and all sorts of fun, so come along, quick! if only for the sake of old times, and help me to organize my 'sprees.' You shall have a room in the Bachelor Quarters, and may (I promise you) be King of the Castle. I have heard, by the way, of the manner in which that Bright girl has treated you. What a shame! but of course you are not going to wear willow, and be laughed at as a disappointed swain. She is a young coquette. I saw her walking with Sir Tittleum in the park this forenoon—a most devoted couple.

“*Toujours à toi,*

“VINE KISSIE.”

The other letter—which was written in pencil on the fly-leaf of an old book, and was a rare specimen of caligraphic art—contained the following words:—

“Fever Hospital, Liverpool Road, Islington,
July 1.

“I am sure you don't know that Honor is ill. She has been lying in fever here for the last ten days; dying, we thought, but yesterday was the crisis, and she is to live—we hope. Her ravings may have meant much or nothing. I fear, much. If she has broken off with you—as I gather she has—I have also gathered the reason. She learned (it is not for me to tell how) that certain doubts exist about the legitimacy of her birth. Such is, unfortunately, the case, and perhaps you ought to know it; but if you are the man I take you to be, it will not affect you in any way, nor will you allow her to remain under the impression that it would be a lifelong sin to marry you, or that you are too proud to endure an *imaginary* blot. Now, a word. I can't stir from here, or from her side, for goodness knows how long, so there is something I want you to do for me. There's a man named Jessel, a land-agent and attorney, who lives near Nutley. Go to him, no matter how hard you have to strive for leave, and ask him boldly whether he knows anything of Honor's parents; who they were, etc. She has raved incessantly about his knowing something, but not telling her except on some condition she doesn't want to accept. There may be nothing in it, but I *want to know*.

“Yours truly,

“BET.

“ P.S., July 5.—Honor is getting on finely, but had a slight relapse on the 1st, which put my letter out of my head. I am writing to-day, at her request, to an old woman named Nest—Mrs. Nest, her foster-mother, I believe—to see if she can take Honor for awhile for change of air, when she is strong enough to travel. It's only a farmhouse, but Honor's not particular. She wants to be near Nutley, and with old friends. I hope you'll contrive to go and see her there. Mrs. Nest's, remember.”

The first of these two letters, being entrusted to the hands of the truthful page who was so close an observer of human nature, found its way safely enough to the red pillar-box which formed a receptacle for so many of Lady Kissie's delectable epistles—going from thence, by the usual course of transition, to Major Deverill's quarters at Chatham, and reaching that gentleman on his return from a hot and tiresome morning drill. The second, being entrusted to the care of a hospital nurse, with a cold in her head which made her stupid, and a friend, a night porter, who was entrusted to post it, got forgotten between the nurse and the friend, and was only remembered when, a month after date, it turned up in the pocket of the latter and was posted in hot haste, after an awful inward controversy as to the advisability or otherwise of committing it, under all circumstances, to the flames.

As it presented, on arrival, a somewhat unique appearance, it was peculiarly characteristic of the writer whose signature it bore.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OVER all the land there was a radiance of summer sunshine. Over the lake, lying like a sheet of molten silver between Nutley and the heather-clad mountains away on the other side; over the fields of grain, ripening to harvest, so that the ears stood up, stiff and rustling, in the hot sunshine which turned their green to gold; over the daisy-dotted sward of the meadows, for some late thunder-showers on the mown grass had brought up the little pink-tipped blossoms like the stars in the firmament for multitude; over the hedgerows, where the blackberries were ripening in thick, delicious clusters, dark with the purple of promised sweetness; over the fields at Nest Farm, and the gardens attached to it—prolific, and neatly cared for; over the spacious yard, so full of busy life, and the splendid old orchard, bearing myriads of gold and crimson apples aloft upon its gnarled trees. There was sunshine, bright and lovely, over them all; only in the lane was there shadow—and there, knee-deep in the lush green grasses, the broad dock, and cool sorrel leaves, stood the cows, placidly chewing their cud, and switching away with their long tails the teasing flies that had followed them even beneath the tangled growth of brambles, hawthorns, and ivied boughs.

The white dust, tracked with many a footmark, lay undisturbed upon the road, and through it, with feet wearily trailing, and black skirts lifted languidly that they might not suffer by contact with it, a girl—Honor—walked.

The road was a familiar one. She had traversed it scores of times when a child—known every inch of it from her very earliest years. The little gate which she at length paused to unlatch had many times admitted her childish footsteps, sobered for such grave occasions as Sunday-school and church. Dear little white gate, with rusty hinges, just as of old; gravelled pathway, winding and odd, with grass still growing disobediently upon it; ancient church porch, as usual undergoing repairs, with queer

little ivy-choked nook above it, from which owls' faces had ever been wont to peep; grey old tower, round which the clinging tendrils of polished ivy clasped their many fibrous fingers, preserving from that decay of which they were the emblems. Beloved old door, by which she had so often entered, guided lovingly by a hand that had since mouldered into dust.

To his grave she was going now. It was her daily walk. Lone grave! so distinct from the rest; away in the quiet corner, where he had asked that he might be laid, apart from all others, even from kith and kin. It had not been neglected during the short, feverish epoch of her London life; some careful hand had tended it. The flowers that bloomed upon it showed watchful nursing: there was not a leaf astray. He who slept there had not passed out of remembrance; his kindly deeds had made him a monument, more enduring than marble or stone. Not a foot ever went that way that did not pause in pious recollection of the beloved dead; not a child passed by the quiet mound without a lingering look, a reverence, or the bestowal of a little wreath or nosegay which baby fingers had made. It was pleasant that it should be so; most pleasant and good: for surely of all the ingredients in the horror which death inspires, there is not one that has a larger share in making it terrible than the bitter thought that we are forgotten, or that the friends we mourn have passed from all remembrance, save our own. Oh, that exile of the body which we have loved! How we think of it, in the harsh nights when the window is lashed by driving rains! How we picture the form we have cherished, the face we have kissed, the hands we have clasped and held—lying there, in that sodden trench; the very face, the very hands—our friend, our father, our little child. The body is not removed from earth, it is there, lying this chill night in the clay, and we think of it musingly—not repiningly, not in hatred of what must be and what is right, not rebelliously or in despair, but we *think* of it, ponder upon it, and go once and again, if not oftener, and stand beside the grave. It is the dead man's right. We do not come away any the worse.

Among the long, warm, luscious grasses Honor lay down—companionless this time; her faithful comrade was gone from her side for ever. Yet there was nothing of despair, or of desolate prostration in her restful attitude. She had taken up her cross and was bearing it, with what pain and weariness none save herself knew. She had put on the difficult armour, with

all its weighty adjuncts, and meant to wear it with such courage and strength as God gives to His afflicted. She is no imaginary heroine, she has had her prototypes in real life—rare and admirable women, full of earnest resolution, who, having seen the necessity, have faced it, nor ever lain down beneath their load.

Life to Honor was a changed thing. Nothing was as she had known it; all things were different from what she had believed. Derrick, for instance, was one amongst the many. She had broken off her brief engagement with him—wilfully, it is true, and of her own accord, without offering reason or excuse, and had asked, nay, implored him not to strive for a renewal of it, or even to communicate with her by letter: actually refraining from giving him an address which would have enabled him to do so. Still, she had scarcely believed that he would so soon have forgotten; she had hardly thought he would have remained so perfectly passive as he had done. Clearly, he had been quite willing to accept her decision; his silence proved it.

She was not by any means *sorry* that his indifference was thus, as she believed, plainly manifested, but she was surprised, and hurt. She had not thought he would be willing to give her up so readily—to accept his freedom without an effort at being led captive again. In short, he was not, apparently, the idol she had worshipped; and with a strange, yet not unnatural inconsistency, she blamed him for doing as she had bidden him, and, in the solitude of her grassy retreat, lifted her white young face for a moment with an odd defiant air, and smiled, a hard grim little smile, as she reflected on the manner in which Fate makes footballs of us all. Had things fallen out differently—as had seemed certain, for instance, on the evening of her betrothal—she had at that moment been an honoured and happy wife, far away with her beloved, beneath the sunshine of Italian skies; restful and blest, in the land where he had told her their honeymoon should be passed, amidst the myrtle and the vine, and the valleys where the summer sleeps, and the rivers murmur memories and legends of old: amidst the heaven-tipped hills, and the glossy glades, and the silvery fountains, beautiful as though nymph and spirit held and decorated an earthly home.

She spread her hands to the sultry breezes, and laughed as she thought of it all. Romance was such a beauteous picture, Reality such an ugly one! She gazed at her coarse gown (all others had been left behind, with the grandeur she had for ever forsaken), she stretched her slender neck, and looked across

the tree-tops at the distant gables of the farm-house where she was living, a dependant upon the charity of its inmates. Yes, the charity! What else was it? She had no money wherewith to pay them, she had to wait for her earnings to come in before she could even proffer any return for the hospitality which humble but honest hearts were showing her. Welcome she was, as Irish bounty could make her, and she knew it; but, were they to turn her forth that night, she must either perish or beg. They loved to have her—the simple pair with whom her abode was for awhile—because her childhood had been associated with them, and they had known and revered the dead whose memory was so dear to her; and she loved to be with them because they talked of him, and because from the window of her little chamber she could see the trees about Nutley, and watch the birds that built their nests among the branches, and taste of the sweet air that came wafted up from the fields and gardens, like heaven's own perfume to her yearning lips. At night, too, when it was dark, or only the stars could see her, she could creep away down the road, and kneel upon the steps which led up to the oaken porch, and clasp the closed gate with her clinging hands, gazing in through its bars at the gravelled sweep that led to the house, along which, when a child, she had been wont to run to meet her guardian returning from fair or town—or to roll her hoop for exercise when heavy rains had made rivulets upon the roads without.

It was sweet to see these things, though she dared not touch, or tread; never again might she lay so much as a finger on anything appertaining to the man who had wrought her woe; and this place, her once dear home, belonged to him, in the hidden mystery of that grim fatality which deals blow and balsam, boon and bitterness, with so strangely uncertain a hand!—giving to some (and oftentimes the most unworthy) benefits of which the deserving are bereft. She had called him “guardian” for awhile, in the room of him beside whose grave she was lying—had lived in his house, and eaten of his substance. How she hated to think of it. True, he had never, even when she was fondest of him, filled the place in her heart which the dead had occupied—and yet, the temporary love and obedience which in her innocence she had given him, seemed now to her like a disloyalty which was avenged by the grief and humiliation she had been called upon to bear.

It is often so in life; we love and love again, yet never—or

rarely—without a sort of shadowy remorse; a feeling as though we were wronging the dead by taking from them a portion of what ought to be wholly theirs, and as though a spectre in the form of retribution, in some shape or other, were surely following our footsteps and hovering like a skeleton about our board. Circumstances may induce us to give affection—for a time, at all events—elsewhere. We may not be able to help it. Duty, gratitude, or awakened feeling may constrain us; these things are not to be accounted for, but we are sorry for it all the while, and through the sound of laughter comes the wail of gathering tears.

Alas, none but those who have cherished in their souls the image of some dead, who have watched over it for long in secrecy and gloom, who have filled all things with *recollection* as with a spell, and made the universe one wide mausoleum of the lost—none but those can understand the mystery of that regret which is shed over every after-affection, even though it be more burning and intense; that sense of sacrilege with which we fill up the haunted recesses of the spirit with a *living* idol, perpetrating the last act of infidelity to that buried love which the heavens that now receive it, the earth whereon we cherished it, tell us with the unnumbered voices of Nature, to worship with the incense of our faith.

Honor got slowly up from her grassy couch. Quite an hour or more had she lain there, all unconscious of the rapid flight of time. A few heavy rain-drops were falling, precursors of a gathering storm. The sky looked lurid and overcast, the fiery red of the sun-god's chariot-wheels was merged in rolling cloud. The girl turned her face upwards to the descending rain. A summer thunder-shower had begun to fall. It was upon her ere the little gate could be gained, and the lightning was playing about her before she had taken many steps upon her way homewards. To return as she had come would be impossible—or, at least, unwise—for it would necessitate the crossing of some meadows which would, by the time she reached them, be submerged by the rain, and her shoes were none of the heaviest. There was nothing for it but to keep along the high road, which, though a longer, was certainly a safer way.

The storm became terrific. Every tree sent its torrent of glittering drops teeming down upon the deluged earth; every flower that grew in the hedgerows, an hour ago so dusty and parched, was drenched to its thirsty heart. A hay-cart came

along, the driver lying at full length on top, striving to bury himself for shelter beneath the surface of his dripping load, the poor patient horse tossing his tired head as the lightning gleamed in his eyes, while the rough terrier dog which walked alongside, forgot to frisk or bark, as was his wont, and sneaked forward with neck stooped, and draggled drooping tail, the very picture of despondency.

From head to foot Honor had not a dry thread upon her body. Streams of water descended from her shoulders ; her skirts were heavy with it, her shoes filled by it ; they positively rattled as she walked. There was not any shelter at hand ; trees and bushes were alike drowned ; even the little sparrow that rested for a moment upon a swaying branch, was glad to shake himself and fly away again—the clear droppings from the skies being preferable to those that came from a thousand drenched leaflets above his head.

Bravely Honor plodded on, seeing no further signs of life about her, until a turning in the road revealed a change in the aspect of her surroundings, as distinct as any which the lapse of time could ever possibly effect. A wide tract of country lay outspread before her—waste and pasture lands, interspersed with running streams, swollen into unwonted rapidity and breadth ; their voices blended with the rushing sound of the wind and the distant roll of the thunder, which now seemed lulled for awhile, yet anon reverberated amongst the echoing hills.

The entire scene was of that savage yet sublime character which suited well with the wrath of the aroused elements. Dark woods, large tracts of unenclosed heath, abrupt variations of hill and vale, and a dim and broken outline beyond of wild, rugged mountains, formed the features of that romantic district. She passed a group of terrified peasants, cowering beneath a tree. The oldest hid his head and shuddered, but the youngest looked steadily at the lightning, which played at fitful intervals over the mountain-stream that rushed rapidly at their feet.

Honor went by them, unnoticed and silent. To her, Nature, heaven, earth, had nothing for fear and everything for reflection. She was young, and could lose the sense of what *was*, by thinking of what was to be ; unlike the old, who, having no future (earthly) to expect, are ever vividly alive to the present, with the perils and pleasures which surround it.

Leaving the beaten path, she hurried on by the margin of a wide and swelling stream, which broadened at length into a kind of lake, the waters of which, now dark as night, flashed anon into a plain of fire beneath the coruscations of the lightning. The clouds swept on in massy columns, dark and aspiring,—veiling, whilst they rolled up to, the great heavens, like the shadows of human doubt. “It is,” said a certain philosopher, “in the conflicts of Nature that man most feels his littleness.” Like all general maxims, this is only partially true. The mind which takes its first ideas from perception must take also its tone from the character of the objects perceived. In mingling our spirits with the great elements, we partake of their sublimities—we awaken *thought* from the secret depths where it has lain concealed—our feelings are too excited to remain riveted upon ourselves: they blend with the powers that are abroad; and, as in the agitation of men, the individual arouses from himself to become a portion of the crowd, so, in the convulsions of Nature, we are equally awakened from the littleness of self, to be lost in the grandeur of the conflict by which we are surrounded.

Honor paused, unfearing, with almost a smile upon her lips. She could have mocked at the fury of the elements, so much less terrible to her than the passions of the heart; at the devastations of the skies, so little desolating compared with the wrath of man. The convulsions of Nature should carry no terror to the soul. It rests secure—indestructible,—inasmuch as the ETERNAL is written upon it.

She turned to the shadowy moor, and as the lightning wrapt in sheets of fire, like a spectral throng, the tall and waving trees by which it was encircled, and, as suddenly ceasing, the jaws of gloom devoured up the scene, she compared—with that bitter alchemy of feeling which revolves all into one crucible of thought—those alternations of light and shadow with the history of her own chequered life.

She walked on; no idea of hurrying now. It seemed too late for haste; such mischief as could be done was already accomplished. Wetter she could not be, and the chances of getting dry were not to be materially hastened by any speed which she was then capable of making. A few steps further, and shelter from wet and fatigue appeared nigh. The turrets of an old castellated residence, long fallen into decay, uprose among an adjacent clump of trees. Honor knew it well, had

often played there when a child, and frightened herself by conjuring up images of dead cavaliers and dames of high degree, stepping in and out among the ruined arches. The ancient pile, with its shattered doorways and moss-grown parapets, was situated on a gentle declivity, and surrounded by dark elm and larch-trees. It still retained traces of former consequence, and of the perils to which that consequence had exposed it. A broad ditch, overgrown with weeds, indicated the remains of what had once been a moat, and the huge rough stones which lay scattered around it spoke of the outworks it had anciently possessed, and the stout resistance they had made against the sturdy followers of Cromwell. It was a quaint, romantic old place, full of interest and wild beauties, even in the full light of garish day; whilst at night, when owl and bat were abroad, and travelling artists, armed with pencil and brush, paused before the ruins to transfer to canvas this "one more gem of Irish scenery," its weird grandeur was even more fully apparent; for then the moon, that flatterer of decay, shed its softening beauty over a spot which else had been desolate and hard, and kissed into light the long and unwavering herbage which rose at intervals amongst the fallen stonework, like the false parasites of humbled greatness.

Taking her way swiftly over the once familiar ground, Honor gained the old building, and, creeping in beneath the hanging ivy, sat down upon a stone to rest. That she was wet and heated, and but a brief time recovered from recent severe illness, never entered her mind, so soon as the ceaseless pelt of the rain was no longer felt upon her head. She was in shelter—away from all living and disturbing things—and, being so, could indulge unmolested in the luxury of reflection. There, she thought, was the little bit of lichen-covered wall on which her dead guardian had one day sat and rested, after a long walk with her—a child then—on a fine October afternoon. There, too, was the big stone on which she had sat at his feet, and there the convenient ledge close by, on which she had laid the heap of shining brown nuts, tied up close and tight in her darling's handkerchief, the gathering of which had formed the ostensible excuse for their long but pleasant excursion. There was the ruined doorway through which she had strayed, and lost herself for an interminable time—quite five minutes—and by which she had at length returned again, in palpitating terror, to the kind, patient companion to whom her fairy wanderings

had been a source of much interest and amusement. There was—what? What *could* that be, standing so still and dark, quite near her, too, with earnest, melancholy eyes fixed full upon her face and form? A figure, framed in a doorway—as it were with shining ivy—and, like herself, alone amid the ruins. Honor had a brave heart. The lips from which in youth she had learned wisdom had taught her to denounce superstition; she believed in no supernatural tales, or in the reality of miraculous visions; yet in that moment her cheek blanched with a nameless, terrible dread. She rose up, white and shrinking, for either she beheld a phantom, or Derrick, her once betrothed, stood close by her side.

He saw her fear, and hastened to relieve it by stepping forwards into the light; no spirit, but a sunburnt, travel-stained, stern-faced man; not the Derrick—and yet the very same—whom she had known and loved.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"ARE we to shake hands?" he had said to her, weeks before, in the library at Colonel Blount's house. Even so doubting a question he did not ask now, but stood gazing, waiting for her to speak.

The shock and surprise were alike great. For an instant she put her hands to her face, seeking courage and strength. That he had come to ask for a renewal of their troth was her one thought and dread; what had detained him until then she knew not, or questioned. A single look at his weary face told her that he had not altered: he loved her still. Were her struggles to be borne afresh, her quivering wounds re-opened? Ay, truly, or so it seemed likely; and yet, through all her sorrow and regret, was the radiance of a great joy, a wild, tumultuous gladness, that he was *near her again*.

"Are you Derrick, or do I dream?" she asked, with her glowing eyes upon him.

He bent his head.

"I am Derrick."

Then she laughed—laughed with innocent delight at once again beholding him—her one true love! They might soon have to part; they probably *should*; but for a while, for the present moment, he was with her—they were not wholly divided. She held her hands joyfully to him, and advanced as if to greet him; but he stood in his place, and gazed at her with a strange, scared look. It frightened her. She drew back chilled. Last time they had stood together it had been breast to breast, lip to lip, fingers clasped and intertwined, soul answering soul, in that sweet commingling of the ideal and the substance which those who have felt it—known and lost it—would give years of life to bring back again, though it were for one brief moment only. How different now!

The contrast was too great, the change too utter. The weight on her burdened heart was too heavy to bear. Of self-

command she had abundance, as had been often proved, but its last limits had been reached weeks before; they were now exceeded. Sickness had weakened her, sorrow well-nigh broken her heart. She burst into uncontrollable tears.

Derrick offered no word of comfort, or yet of remonstrance. He uttered a kind of groan, and turned aside, and waited—waited for her to grow calm. It was better, he thought; but God in heaven alone knew the battle that raged within his breast. He turned slowly, as her sobs subsided, and asked her,

“Have you any blame to offer *me*?”

She had none. He had done precisely as she had bidden him—had kept apart from her, nor sought to see her, or to communicate with her since the day of their betrothal. There was not anything, therefore, for which to blame him, and she told him so, with all her strong, great love welling up in her heart and in her voice, but kept down by the force of a prayed-for strength.

“Because, you *know*,” he went on, in a low, broken, dreary voice, “I should never have changed. *Never!* You believe me, do you not?”

Ay, most truly did she. Her soul in her eyes answered him.

“There is something you ought to know,” he went on, in a quick tone of pain, “and yet I hate to tell you—but it cannot be helped. Your letter—that one you wrote me from Grosvenor Place—never would have kept me from you. It did not; I disobeyed it. I tried to see you, and at once. Mrs. Blount received me, and *deceived* me. I need not go into the story—she is my mother—but I was led to believe that you were in the house and obstinately declined to see me. I have since learned that you were, at the time, where you should never have been sent. Then I went away—went, I don’t know where—to the devil, I believe!” with a short, wild laugh. “It is very easy to go there, but hard enough to get back. I really don’t know what I did, or did not do; but one day—some weeks ago now—I got a letter from Bet, telling me something of the truth, and where you meant to go when you recovered. It had been written a month before, but not posted. Whoever she had entrusted it to had forgotten all about it, or had laid it designedly aside; the first, most likely, in a place like that, for it was written from the hospital. I see by your surprise that you were not told anything of it. She thought you too ill at the time, I suppose, but I fancied you might have heard something since. Well, I had been

running riot, getting through my leave at a startling rate, and it was just up. I wrote that day for an extension, and by the same post sent a line to Bet, telling her that I had only just received her letter, but would not fail to do as she asked, which was to come and see you, and also to execute another commission, which I hope to get through to-morrow, if not to-night. I have been a long while setting about it, for my application for leave was refused, and it was only the day before yesterday that I managed to squeeze out five days' furlough; so I must, of course, go back to Dublin some time to-morrow, and return to Chatham next day."

He hurried through this recital, as though desirous of coming to an end—looking straight before him while he spoke, and keeping his gaze purposely averted from his companion's face. Clearly he was getting through a task which was not at all a congenial one.

"I should tell you," he went on, "that when writing to Bet I addressed to her father's house, 'to be forwarded,' for I could not tell where she might be, after so long a time. She answered from Scotland, saying, among a lot of other things, that she was there with Colonel Blount, who was about starting for Leicestershire to entertain a lot of friends, and that she herself was ill with cold and cough; but I was not to tell you—you see I am not to be trusted—but was to come straight to Galway, get through the commission she had given me, and call to see you at Mrs. Nest's, where you were still stopping. I came off as soon as possible, landed at Kingstown last evening, got down here to-day, and was on my road to fulfil my orders, when this storm came on and sent me in here for shelter—as it seems to have sent you also—although too late in your case, as I see, to prevent your being thoroughly wetted. I have been more fortunate, and have got no rain at all—or next to none. Now you know my story."

He stopped again, still standing aloof, and looking out, away from her, as though preferring not to meet her eyes. Not a word did he say of any renewal of their betrothal; not so much as a hint did he let fall concerning it. So far she had no new battle to dread.

There was a pause, the storm sullenly subsiding.

"Do you think is Bet very ill?" asked Honor, with a pang. "She has not mentioned a word of herself in any of her letters to me. She nursed me day and night through my sickness,

subjected to every draught, and of course to great fatigue; nor was she ever really strong at any time."

"I can tell you nothing definite," he evasively answered: "in fact, I was not to say anything to you at all. She mentioned that her father and his wife were shortly going abroad, and that, as Mrs. Blount was opposed to her accompanying them, she would be free at that time, and would come to Nutley to be near you. This I fancy you know already, for of course she writes to you."

"Yes, when she can; but I did not know that she was very ill, or even ailing."

"I do not think I said '*very* ill,'" observed Derrick, in a low voice, which sounded like one of sympathy.

"No, you did not," Honor answered, bitterly; "but I am something of a thought-reader; I can see that there is a secret which I am not to know, until I find it out for myself. Well, it was good of you to come and see me, and now that the storm is over we need not remain here any longer."

She was growing nervous beneath his fixed and melancholy gaze, for he no longer kept his eyes averted, but had fastened them hungrily upon her face. Not a word, however, did he utter which could cause her to think that he meant making any reference to their former relations; and she wondered whether such were indeed coming, and whether or not she should find strength to resist his will.

They emerged from the shelter of the ruins, and entered again upon the high road, which was then entirely deserted, and was running with myriads of glistening streams. Honor shivered as she walked, though a feverish burning was over all her frame.

"You are chilled," said Derrick, "and I have nothing to offer you. My flask is the driest thing about me, though I *have* got off so much better than you."

She smiled a little.

"Do not trouble. I shall soon get warm. Mrs. Nest makes me quite comfortable, and we are not far off now."

"Do you intend remaining with her?" inquired Deverill, with interest.

"For a while, yes. I have not anything else in view. When I am better educated (I mean to read hard all through this autumn), I shall seek a situation as resident teacher. At present I have a few daily tuitions, which help me in two ways: indeed,

in three: they will in time enable me to pay Mrs. Nest for my living; they keep in my memory such trifling knowledge as I possess; and they prevent my mind from dwelling upon things which I am glad to forget, even for a little while."

"They are all in your neighbourhood, these tuitions, I suppose?" said Deverill, with a curious, dark expression upon his saddened face.

"Yes, or nearly all. I could not walk far, and Mrs. Nest does not keep a vehicle. I teach the curate's six children, and Mrs. Tenterden Jones's three; and four or five others come to me from the village. I have really almost as much as I can do; and I am writing a book besides—fancy that!—in the hope that some publisher may buy it from me. I wonder are they as obdurate as people say? If so, I must place *all* my hopes upon tuitions.

Deverill positively writhed as she spoke. That she should feel a necessity for all this labour was more than he could bear to think of.

"And are—these—people—*nice* to you?" he asked, in an almost awe-stricken tone. "Are they kind? Do they appreciate you?"

"Oh, yes! The curate's wife gives me my dinner every day I go there; and she offered me a bed once, when it rained very hard. She is quite a ladylike person, and does not allow the children to be rude when she can prevent it. Mrs. Tenterden Jones is kind, too. She gives musical parties, and I am told that when the next comes off I am to sing at it."

There was something which sounded like scorn in her voice, but her face was turned away; he could not see it. She was stalking along at so excessive a rate, that, with all his superior strength and length of limb, he was scarcely able to keep alongside of her. Presently she turned her head again, and looked stolidly before her as she walked; and he could then see that on her face was a little dry smile, as though she despised the things of which she had been speaking.

"Had you known her before?—Mrs. Tenterden Jones, I mean. Was she one of your acquaintances when you lived here?" asked Derrick, with a crushed desire at his heartstrings to snatch her away from such surroundings to his own strong breast, where she ought so surely to have been resting then.

"Known her?—oh, yes! that is, to bow to. She used to invite me over sometimes from Nutley, when my darling was

alive—but I was not allowed to go. Now, I fancy, it is pleasant to her to think that I am glad to do so."

Terribly fast was she walking—quite striding, in fact—and her small white face looked pinched and set; not in the least like the sunny April one which he had kissed and held to his own, in Colonel Blount's study, such a short while before; a girl's face then, all youth and hope, and rich with the ripe colouring which pleasure gives; a woman's now, blanched and hardened by what the world had been doing to make it so.

Derrick smothered a groan.

"I wish," he said, "you would not tell me of these things. They will haunt me. If you have to bear them, I would rather not know."

There was positively a look of tears in his pitying eyes, but Honor laughed—though her heart was breaking.

"Never mind," she said, cheerily. "It is not so very hard, after all—or will not be after a little while. Custom softens everything. Here we are!" pausing before a rustic gate leading up to a comfortable thatched farmhouse, from the door of which a pretty-faced girl of about her own age was anxiously peering. "I can't invite you in," said Honor, standing tall and straight at the entrance to her humble abode, with a little sharp blush flickering uneasily over her pure cheeks. "There is not any drawing-room here, or anything to offer you to eat, except, perhaps, *bacon*; or, what I know you like even less—milk."

"I assure you I have grown quite—quite fond of bacon! I will sit on the kitchen table and drink milk by the quart, if I may only come in," said Derrick, with impulsive longing; but Honor resolutely closed the gate between them.

"No," she answered, "even at the risk of appearing inhospitable, I shall not allow it. If you can come to-morrow, before my lesson hours—or after—I shall have leisure, and there will most likely be better fare. Everything will not be eaten up, as it is now."

"I will come, early: in the morning!" he eagerly responded; and then she gave him her hand, demurely, across the paling, because he had not asked to be her lover again.

But glad though she was because of it, and thankful too, beyond what words could tell—she nevertheless could not help marvelling at him, as she walked up the little pathway—knowing, as she did, that he still so dearly loved her.

"His mother said he was a proud man," was her sighing reflection; "I know it now for myself."

CHAPTER XXXV

As Honor went up to the porch, the girl who had been gazing from it advanced hurriedly to meet her. She was indeed a pretty little maiden, her beauty being of the Spanish type, such as is not unfrequently seen among the peasantry—famed for their good looks—in the Tuosist, and about Galway and Kenmare. There was not much of the original Celt in her features, which were classic, yet soft; her eyes were lustrous and brown: her mouth and nose well-formed and refined. Her figure was erect and active, with a lightness of step and motion, generally only attainable by constant practice in walking over mountainous lands. Her clothing was coarse, but remarkably neat and well put on. She wore a gown of grey flannel, or frieze, manufactured in the district wherein she lived, the skirt not extending to her feet, but coming only to within seven or eight inches of them, the bodice open at the bosom, and a leather strap buckled about her waist. Her hair, which was black as night, was neatly parted upon her forehead, and hung in rippling waves down her back. Her complexion was a clear olive, with the rich bright colouring so characteristic of the youthful peasantry of her land, whilst the teeth which showed betwixt her parted lips, would have inspired envy in the breast of many a city belle.

The usually tinted cheeks were, however, less ruddy now than was their wont, and the soft eyes were strangely wistful, and heavy with recent tears.

Honor looked at her with anxious regard. Her own sorrow, so uncomplainingly borne, made her at all times regretful for that of others.

“What is the matter, Sheelah?” she inquired.

“Oh, sure, miss, it’s bad enough,” replied the girl ready to weep again. “Awful bad indeed it is, and there’s not one only yourself can help me. I’ll wait, though, awhile, before I tell you, for you’re wet to the skin, God help you! Mother’s been

so uneasy, she bade me keep a look-out; and now she's wetting a cup o' tea to warm you, so if you'll drink it right off, and come up to change, I'll be in your room and can tell you what I want."

This was all poured out in a torrent of eager whispering, and with a confidence which proved that the girl knew it was a friend to whom she spoke.

"I will come—at once," said Honor, with ready acquiescence. "Have your story all ready, and we will see what can be done. But no tears, mind. You and I can work much better without them. Now, here is your mother, come to scold me for stopping out so late. Go, and I will follow you."

Sheelah tried to smile, and, with a grateful squeeze of the hand which, in her earnestness, she had laid hold upon, darted hurriedly away, and disappeared up the little staircase, leaving her shivering friend in the care of a thin, cheery, bright-eyed old woman, with dry grey hair blowing in little wisps about her face.

"Well, what is it that I am to do for you?" Honor asked, when, half an hour later, she was, with Sheelah's assistance, arrayed in dry garments, and was seated with her at the window of a pleasant little upstairs room of the plainest and homeliest description, but perfectly neat and clean, and made bright with many flowers. Pleasanter far was it to its occupant than had ever been her more pretentious chamber at Colonel Blount's house, or, indeed, than any other which she had yet called her own, excepting that at Nutley, so near, and yet—so far!

"What can I do for you?" she repeated, for the girl, with visible impatience, was manifestly longing for her to be at leisure to speak, and now falling upon her knees beside her, poured out a dismal tale.

She had been engaged, as Honor knew, for two years or more to a young blacksmith, Will Cree—but he had wanted her, she said, to go away to America with him, and she could not bear to leave her aged mother; and so, betwixt his urging and her refusals, things had been very unhappy between them. Three months before, or upwards, he had come one night to the kitchen window, where she had been sitting alone, finishing some work she was anxious to get done, and had asked to be allowed to come in. This she had, of course, refused, but had on pressure gone to speak with him outside, and it had then transpired that what he wanted to urge upon her was to run away with him that very night, and take ship for America next day, when they should have been married by the priest.

"I couldn't do it, Miss Honor," said the weeping girl, piteously wiping her eyes, "when I thought of the poor old mother that reared me, and the place, and all that I care so much for here; and, when I told him so, he said he'd just turn round and join the boys—that he'd been often asked to do it, and had held out on my account, but wouldn't hold out any longer. They had a meeting that night, he said, in Brown's barn, and he would go and get sworn in there. Well, I begged and prayed all I could; it wasn't of any use; he'd be sworn, he said, for the glory of Ireland, and nothing would turn him from it unless I'd promise to go along with him to the priest, and leave my mother without seeing her again; 'because, if I let you go to bid her good-bye,' said he, 'you'll never come with me at all!' and no more I wouldn't; but I *couldn't* go, in any case. I knew it would bring us a curse, for she was against Will altogether, and said I'd never have her blessing if I married him; so when I kept on refusing, he took a big oath that he'd go straight and join them that was to give freedom to the country; but, if I'd change my mind and give in to him, he and I'd take ship, he said, at once, and he'd never get sworn in at all. I believe I'd have gone along with him, Miss Honor, for I loved him dearly, but just then I heard my mother call to me for something, and the sound of her voice brought me back to my duty, and gave me courage, like, to refuse what he was asking. 'Good-bye, Will,' I said, 'I never can go with you. For God's sake don't ask me! I can't do it!' 'All right, Sheelah,' says he, 'I'll never ask again. I'll join the boys to-night.' And he went."

Her tears stopped her utterance. Honor sat quite still, listening intently. Her own heart was so racked with pain that she could feel for the woes of others as keenly as though she were indeed a personal sharer in them.

"And now, what I want to tell you, Miss Honor, is this," went on the girl, choking down her sobs, and speaking with anxious haste; "the police has a warrant out again Will; but it's only for what they call a 'sault case. He was always a fighting chap, and he thrashed Bill Brierly coming from Lara fair. No boy ever deserved it more either, but of course it got Will into trouble, and the warrant's out now to take him. They've nothing else at all against him; he has took the oath, there's no denyin', and is one o' the boys; but that's all—*yet*; thank God!"

Here she sobbed so bitterly that Honor, although unwilling to speak until she should hear the end, was constrained to offer her some comfort.

"You really must cheer up, Sheelah," she said, consolingly; "I can do nothing for you if you do not. I cannot even hear what you are saying, or understand what it is that you want me to do. Come! be a woman! Things might be a great deal worse; might they not?"

"Oh, miss, you don't know! I haven't told you," wept poor Sheelah, bursting afresh into bitter lamentations; "I'm afraid to name it to mortal, or to let even the walls hear me say it, but, oh, Miss Honor, dear! he's—he's"—glancing fearfully over her shoulder—"he's *on for the next job!*"

"You mean," said Honor, steadily and sternly, "that he is to commit the next murder with which this most unfortunate country is to be stained and disgraced?"

The girl, with her face buried in her apron, nodded that so it was.

"And how," mused Honor, "how can rational beings, to whom the great God has given sense and reason, believe that by such crimes they are benefiting the land on which, in reality, they are bringing the direst curse?"

"I don't know, Miss Honor," answered Sheelah, lifting her bowed head and gazing upwards at the reddened cloud-gathering sky. "I'm only an ignorant girl, and I don't understand anything at all about it. Maybe it's all the better that I don't too. I couldn't do no good."

"And how do you propose that I shall remedy this awful state of things?" asked Honor, after a moment or two of earnest and silent thought.

"I'll just tell you, miss; it's you that can do it," returned Sheelah, speaking fast and nervously, though her tears no longer flowed. "Will came round here last night again, and told me how things were going, and what he'd soon have to do; and he's no coward, Miss Honor—not a bit of him—but he doesn't want to ruin his soul with blood if he can help it; and so he's anxious now to get clean off out o' the country, where them that he's swore to can never find him, and where there's work for honest boys to do. He wants to go, and then, after a while—when it's all forgot, and he's made a bit o' money—why, he'll come right back as far as Liverpool, and I'll coax mother to let me meet him there, and we'll be married; and maybe then—who knows?

—we might persuade her after a bit to sell the farm, and come out and make her home with us, for what'd she stop here for, Miss Honor, with the country overrun and upset as it is? Anyway, there's nothing I wouldn't do—*nothing*—to save poor Will from the crew he's got in among now."

"Yes; but, Sheelah, I really have not yet seen how I am to be able to help you with all this. If Cree wants to get off, he should give up his associates, and——"

"Do you mean *betray* them, Miss Honor?" asked Sheelah, with widely opening eyes; "he'd *die* before he'd go and do it! Give up their company, of course, miss: that's what he wants for to do; but to tell their names to the police, or say where they're to be found—he'd walk to the gallows before he'd send *them* there! No, Miss Honor! he won't betray one of them: not the very worst, even for the love o' me! all he wants is to get away from them, out o' the country; but, as he says, there's the warrant out again him, and the police will be searching for him by-and-by, and if they go and take him on that warrant he'll be kept in on suspicion—for there's no denying he's not been any good boy lately, at all events—and something bad will be on and done before ever the end comes. 'Will you go off at once if the warrant can be stopped?' I asked him last night, and he swore solemn that he would; and he's not a boy to lie, Miss Honor. He said that if he wasn't taken this week he'd get clean across. An awful oath he'll have to break, he says, by going—but better that than be hanged for murder, and have his soul lost as well!"

"And what"—said Honor, with an assumption of coolness she was very far from feeling—"what have I to do with all this? There is not, so far as I can see, any way in which I can help you."

"Oh, yes; there is, miss; I want the warrant stopped, for just one week—only one—to let him get right away," cried the girl, wild again with excited terror, and clutching her companion as she spoke. "Will would never harm a sparrow if left alone, he's the tenderest-hearted chap as ever was; but if he stops here he'll do anything at all them blackguards bids him; he'll *have* to do it. Save him, Miss Honor, for the dear Lord's sake; save a boy that never yet hurt a hair of an innocent man's head."

"I!" exclaimed Honor, drawing back, in terrible fear. "What on earth can I do? It is the magistrate—the agent—Mr. Jessel—who alone can have——"

She paused, white and agitated; and the girl who was her supplicant burst afresh into a passion of agonised tears.

"That's just it, miss, you've said it all now!" she sobbed; "it's Mr. Jessel can do it. He wouldn't see or notice a poor girl like me, or listen to a word I'd have to say, nor could I show in it at all, Miss Honor; but he'll do it for you, if only for the sake o' them that's gone! My boy may be took to-morrow, or to-night, if the warrant's not stopped. I can't beg to the gentleman, Miss Honour—the agent, I mean—but he'll say 'yes' to you, I know he will: and if you'll go to him now—oh, don't refuse, miss, for God Almighty's sake!—I'll go along with you, every step o' the way, and wait outside until you come with the news. *Don't* say no, miss," she cried in anguish, for Honor had waved a dissenting hand; "I'll die if you do! you can save the boy by a turn o' your finger. You won't let him go straight down to hell for the want of doin' him a good turn! Oh, if Mr. Bright was alive now—Lord rest him!—I'd not have to ask for nothing. He never saw distress yet that he didn't try to help it; and sure you're his own child, Miss Honor, his own flesh and blood, and you'll do what he'd ha' done—him that loved you like he did."

Honor put her hands before her eyes. "His own child!" "His flesh and blood!" Was it really so? Alas! no. Would that it were. Disgrace had not then clung to her, as now it did. She rose up, white but determined, and again sat down irresolute. Her self-discipline had failed; the thing asked of her was too hard.

"I—I will give you a letter to Mr. Jessel," she murmured. "It is all that I can do. To see him myself is impossible. It is hard to have to refuse you, but I cannot do what you want."

The girl got up from her knees. Her look smote Honor to the heart. Her nervous hands wandered for a moment about her head, in a purposeless, dreamy way, and without a word she turned aside, and walked, or rather staggered, to the door.

"Thank you; I'm thankful to you, miss; I'm only a poor ignorant girl!" she murmured, brokenly; and then, with her hand upon the latch, she broke down utterly, and cast herself in complete and thorough desolation prone upon the floor. Her grief was piteous to see; she knelt upon the uncovered boards, her hands clasping her face, while a torrent of tears trickled through her shaking fingers.

Honor was deeply touched. All that was compassionate in

her tender and eminently womanly nature was aroused at sight of such heartfelt sorrow. Sheelah Nest was her foster sister, and from childhood they had loved one another with a deep and true affection, such as children—even though removed by station from one another—will at times contract, and retain tenaciously through all after-life.

Honor loved her humble young companion with her whole warm heart; she sympathised with her to the utmost. There were few things—very few—that she would not have done to serve her; but this was indeed a hard matter to accomplish. It was the one boon that seemed well-nigh impossible to grant. Since she herself had returned to Galway, guardianless, homeless (save for the charity of her friends), and broken in health and spirit, Mr. Jessel's attentions had been kinder and more persistently assiduous than they had ever been in the days of her prosperity, when luxury had surrounded her and Nutley had been her home. She could not doubt his affection for her; he loved her truly; yet his proposal, twice renewed, that she should be his wife, she had upon each occasion firmly rejected, and had—only four short days before—told him kindly but with determination that under all existing circumstances she thought it better that even the acquaintanceship between them should come to an end. It must of necessity do so, sooner or later, and better that it should be then.

He had told her more than once, she said—often indeed—that it was in his power to serve her in a material manner; she did not ask him how: she would accept no favour at his hands, she would entreat him for but one thing, the boon of her complete immunity from his presence. How then, having uttered all this, could she deliberately call upon him to grant a favour which she felt would be refused, knowing, as she did, how stern and unbending were his opinions with regard to the spirit of democracy which was abroad, and the insubordination so terribly rife among the discontented tenantry over whom Colonel Blount ruled, through his agent, with an unflinching and iron hand.

While she was hurriedly weighing these things, and striving amidst a chaos of tangled thoughts to arrange a course of action such as seemed to her proper to pursue, Sheelah again renewed her supplications, in accents so wild and touching that it was impossible to offer further resistance to her agonized prayer. Honor had indeed a generous and a pitying heart; it was, moreover, an heroic one, nor had she ever yet shirked doing a

kindly action for the sake of any pain or humiliation which the performance of it might entail upon herself. To go as a suppliant to the man upon whom of all others she had deliberately turned her back, was not without its bitterness; to crave a favour from one who had long craved such from her, with a determination so obdurate that even repeated refusals had scarcely served to check it, seemed a thing almost beyond the possibility of doing.

But nothing is too hard for those who press forward to the trial with a resolve to *succeed*. To walk in the right path is at times most difficult, but never wholly impracticable. Honor had been striving to stumble along it for such a length of time that her feet could scarcely be more weary or more painfully cut and wounded than they already were; a step more or less upon the hard, narrow, thorny way could make but trifling difference to one who had staggered on so far alone. She jumped up, snatched a hat and shawl from a rack on which they hung, and commenced hurriedly putting them on.

"Don't speak to me: don't thank me!" she said, looking very white and stern, as the girl began to pour forth her gratitude in the warm tones for which the Irish peasantry are, as a rule, remarkable. "It is better, for every reason, that we should not talk. I will go out by the back of the house, that your mother may not question or stop me. You go by the front, keep round by the common, and meet me at the foot of the hill, close by the big tree. Now you understand. When I come up to you, keep behind me for the rest of the way; and, when I go into Mr. Jessel's house, wait outside until I join you. Don't be hasty, or excited; it will not do any good; and remember, you must not be known at all in connection with this matter. *Nobody is to be trusted* in the present melancholy state of things, and you are your mother's only child. I shall not be suspected, but you probably would. Now, dry your tears and do as I bid you. Recollect, I cannot promise to succeed—far from it—but I will do my best."

Without waiting for a word of thanks, she passed rapidly down the rude staircase, and slipped out by a doorway situated in an isolated part of the farmhouse.

Traversing a garden path for a few yards, she got through a plantation—hurriedly, and without a pause—and began to cross the fields, drenched and sodden as they were by recent heavy rains.

The evening had come on, still and dark. A breathless and heavy apprehension seemed gathered in the air; the full large

clouds lay without motion in the dull sky; and between them, at long and scattered intervals, the wan stars looked out. A double shadow seemed to invest the grouped and gloomy trees that stood unwavering, unswayed by any breeze, showing still and dark against the melancholy horizon. The waters of a lake, close by which she passed, lay heavy and unagitated as the sleep of death, and the broken reflections of the abrupt and winding banks rested upon their bosom, like the dream-like remembrance of an existence passed away.

At such an hour there is always something of melancholy in the air, something mournful in seeing the beautiful day die, with its pomp and music, its sunshine and song of birds; how much more so when the night that is drawing on is but the pall that shuts out a heaviness of tears!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

At the foot of the hill, where she had been told to wait, Sheelah was faithfully posted. A small red shawl was cast about her head and shoulders, with that peculiarly becoming, yet careless grace for which her countrywomen, even the humblest among them, are pre-eminently distinguished. She had slipped off her shoes, the better to hasten her movements, and was holding them, toes pointed downwards, in her right hand, while the left was pressed to her bosom as though to still its impatient throbbings. On seeing Honor approach, she slightly altered her position, and, waiting until her benefactress had passed by, dropped behind her without a word, and regulated her pace by that of the girl who walked in advance.

The road they traversed was narrow and lonely, unmarked for a considerable stretch by any signs of human life. Presently, however, they came in sight of a cabin, or little *boreen*, as it is called, with a thatched roof, on which such a supply of grass was growing as would have fed a cow without any material diminution of the crop. It was indeed such a sluggard's roof as one only sees in poor dejected Ireland. A century-old thatch, long, brown, and jagged, sunk into deep clefts and furrows, and covered with clumps of nettles, and tufts of long shaking grasses, tall enough to hide a man in. There was the antiquity of decay, the pride of slothfulness, the triumph of corruption! When they got nearer, they perceived that the gable end had fallen, and that one window was a blind heap of stones. It was in truth a wretched dwelling, with its brown pool and dung-heap before it, and half-fed pigs muzzling among the rubbish in the rear.

From the open doorway, cloudy with noisome odours and smoke, a man appeared, looking out along the road. He seemed a young, good-featured man enough, and not ill-dressed either—too well, in short, for the place and company in which he was :

and Sheelah, creeping close up behind her young foster-sister, whispered, tremblingly,

"That's him, Miss Honor! that's Will, looking out to see if you'd come. I knew he'd walk right down to Murtagh's to watch, and that's why I pressed you about comin' out to-night. Whisht now! Sorra guide us, if that's not Murtagh himself there at his back! It was he got my poor fella' to join the boys, and he thinks to keep a tight hand on him now, the vilyan. Little he knows where we're goin'; he'd watch, only Will is there to keep him in."

Involuntarily Honor glanced at the spot where the redoubtable Murtagh was standing. He was, indeed, and had long been, the ringleader of the disaffection which was sinking the country into ruin, and this was known—yet, the police having no special charge against him, he had not been placed under restraint, and was free to attend meetings and organise them "for the glory of Ireland, and the good of the patriot's land." Once, in Mr. Bright's lifetime, he—this Murtagh—had come up to Nutley to ask some favour at his landlord's hands: had come with fawning smile and sycophant tongue to utter a tale which the just man to whom he told it, refused to hear or credit; and Honor, an unconscious listener to the interview, had heard him curse her guardian, as he had walked, seemingly indifferently, away. She saw his face now, as he caught sight of her. Such a face! God, what a living open-air *Hell* this earth is to some who, for the most part, make it so for themselves! Men who walk with graves gaping about them, to whom every wall is a mosaic of tombstones, to whom the sun seems black, and flowers and sky are hateful, and loving women and tender angel children are things to shake the fist at, in the hopelessness and bitterness of unchanging misery and despair! This was the face of such a purgatorial man; a living heart—dumb, *dead*! His eyes were rayless—his pale, bloodless lips clenched immovably together, like those of a strong stoical subject under the surgeon's knife; no part of his set face moved, except the eyes, the restless bloodshot eyes, that swept the air and the horizon, and prowled suspiciously in every corner of the roadway until they rested with burning basilisk power upon Honor herself—and he pushed Will Cree impatiently aside, as she went bravely by, and spat out upon the roadway, as though to show his impotent contempt for the *protégée* of the man whom he had in vain impleaded.

White in the shimmering light of the risen moon, Honor

hurried onward to the fulfilment of her uncongenial task ; no word upon her lips, not so much as a glance at the scared face of her less courageous companion, until they arrived at the dreaded yet desired goal for which they had together started.

Mr. Jessel's abode was a flat-fronted white house, with a narrow hall-door, and an array of equally narrow windows on each side and above it. A few roses and flowering creepers clung about the walls ; and on the doorstep—for there was only one—a watch-dog of a nondescript breed was lazily lying. A small iron gate formed the approach to the house, which stood in the midst of pleasure-grounds not remarkable for beauty, or yet for extent. On the outside it was an unpretentious dwelling enough ; inside, Honor found, on entering, there was luxury enough to satisfy a king. At Nutley, and nowhere else, had she beheld such a display of comfort, mingled with artistic effect.

"The master's engaged ; he has company dining with him miss," said the old butler, as he bustled about the cosy little study into which he ushered her, in compliance with her request to speak with Mr. Jessel at once ; "and, odd enough, for he's often quite alone, there's a gentleman waiting for him this hour back in the office ; but ladies first, I'm sure, miss ; and I'll tell him you're here."

He went out, and Honor waited ; hearing sounds of talking and laughter—distant, yet distinct—coming cheerily through the closed door ; or it might be through the window, which, being wide open, would of course admit the hum of conversation carried on in an adjacent apartment, where the sash might likewise be thrown up. One voice she felt sure she recognised ; a pleasant, cheery one at all times to her, excepting when, now and again, another less pleasant and slightly shrewish broke in with harsh interruption and spoilt the harmony of the discourse. A dog bayed hoarsely outside, as though at some intruder or chance passer-by, and a night-bird screamed ; otherwise there was quietude out of doors, where all looked shadowy in the ghostly light, as she waited for the great man's coming.

Presently he entered, handsome and dignified as usual, and looking especially well in a smoking-suit of rich brocade. Nothing could have been more courteous than his greeting, nothing more profoundly respectful than the manner in which he bade her welcome to his abode ; yet in his fine eyes there lurked a look of suppressed satisfaction—of triumph, it might be said—which, had she perceived it, would have gone far towards sending her

away without so much as broaching the subject of her visit. As it was, she was too disturbed to notice it. He drew forward a chair that she might rest upon it, and she did so thankfully, while he himself remained standing for a moment, and then took a seat at a respectful distance away.

"I am so honoured by this call, Miss Bright," he said, commencing the conversation to her infinite relief, "that I have not only deserted some friends who have been dining with me, but have actually excused myself altogether from an interview with—a—a friend of yours, I think, who has been good enough to wait for me for quite a long while. May I ask to what I am indebted for the favour of these visits."

"Visits!" repeated Honor, mistaking his meaning; "this is the first I have ever paid you!" and her flushing face and widely opened eyes indicated her surprise at his words.

Mr. Jessel bowed.

"The first, yes," he acquiesced; "certainly,—but only the forerunner, I hope, of others yet to come. No?"—as she shook her head in determined negative—"well—I am sorry. When I said 'visits,' I believe I associated this call of yours with that of your friend, Major Deverill, who has just left without seeing me."

"You were wrong then," said Honor, calmly; "I was entirely unaware that he had been to your house, and, whatever may be the nature of his business, I am totally unacquainted with it. With mine I am sure it has nothing at all to do."

Quietly as she forced herself to speak, her heart was beating wildly. Why Derrick had come there she could not surmise, but that the man before her should in any way connect his name or movements with her own was sufficient to send the hot blood rushing in a tumultuous torrent through her frame.

Her companion bowed again, and a peculiar smile hovered upon his lips.

"Possibly not," he replied; "in fact, surely not, as you say so. May I ask, then——"

"For what I have come?" said Honor, breaking in quickly upon his stilted sentence. "Certainly you may. I am here to ask you, as Colonel Blount's agent and a magistrate of the county, to stop the warrant which the police have in their hands against a young blacksmith named William Cree. You can do it, if you please. There is nothing against him—yet, except his having given a blow where I daresay it was well deserved; and he is anxious to leave the country and go abroad."

Mr. Jessel looked very grave. He toyed with his watch-chain, and beat the carpet with his shapely foot.

"I cannot fancy," he said, lifting his eyes suddenly from the ground whereon they had been cast, and fixing them fully upon her eager face—"I am at a loss to conceive why you, of all persons in the world, should in any way be interested in this Cree. I fear he is a very bad boy."

"I know that," said Honor, steadily—"know, at least, that he *has* been—but he means to reform. Will you not give him a helping hand?"

Mr. Jessel laughed, a little scornfully.

"I am an unbeliever in such sudden reformations, Miss Bright," was his reply; "the fellow wants to get off to brew more mischief in the land for which he tells you he is bound. You are a tender-hearted young lady—credulous, and easily imposed upon. Most women are; their innocence, which means their ignorance of the world, is their chiefest charm. I honour you for your philanthropy, but it is mistaken. You do not *know*. It needs a tough, business-like man of the world, like myself, with a vacuum where a heart ought to be, to deal properly with these Irish villains. You really don't know them, Miss Bright. There is not one of them who is not a Fenian at heart, and whose father or grandfather was not a Ribbon-man or Peep-o'-day boy before him. Equality, and murder to further it, is what they want. Give them the land into their own hands, freely and entirely, let them manage it, till it, reap the profits of it, and pay no rent; what then? Will they be satisfied? Certainly not. So long as the rightful owner of it is there to look on, they won't be contented until his removal has been determined upon. Not content with his ruin, they will want his life. Brutes! I would stamp them from off the face of the earth!" and, with a very ferocious stamp indeed, the agent—who was and was likely to be brought so much into contact with the class he so bitterly denounced—got up from the seat on which he had evidently been ill at ease, and angrily swept the hair from his handsome forehead as he began to pace the limits of the narrow room.

Honor sighed heavily.

"It used not to be so," she said, "in my dear guardian's lifetime. I believe his tenantry would have died for him. Even of late years, when there was trouble in every other quarter, Nutley was always at peace.

Mr. Jessel paused, and looked at her.

"You will pardon me," he said, "for saying that you talk, womanlike, without a knowledge of your subject, and so to argue with you would be vain, even if not unpleasant and discourteous, which I should certainly feel it to be. Let us drop the matter, and go on with that for which you have come."

"I am quite willing," responded Honor, a little warmly—for she loved her countrymen with a blind idolatry which made her oblivious of their faults. "It cannot, be assured, afford me any pleasure to discuss the conduct of a people who never turned until they had been trodden upon and oppressed beyond all endurance, by men who took from them the uttermost farthing, and spent their little earnings away in other lands, where no benefit from them could possibly arise to the tenants. They have not had *justice*, and as God's creatures, with souls like to our own, they had, and have, a right to expect it."

Mr. Jessel smiled at her warmth.

"You think, then, that Irish landlords should be enforced stay-at-homes, to please their tenantry, who, even at the best of times, only paid a fair rent for their holdings, and were frequently in arrears with that."

"I think nothing of the kind," said Honor, firmly, "but I do not think that they have any right to fly a country, as though its very pastures were poisoned, and yet expect love and fidelity from a tenantry in whom they take neither interest nor pride. Look at this district," she went on, pointing a sweeping hand around. "Is there a single family of gentry resident here? I say, no! It is all very well to declare that 'the *people* drove them away.' Nonsense and falsehood! it was they who made the people what they are to-day by wrongs and oppression, and bitter, bitter want of feeling for their distress. Don't tell me that I do not know. Did I not see my guardian able to live amongst his tenantry, and adored by them too, as though he were a god—and why?"

"I can answer," responded Mr. Jessel, pausing with a grim smile upon his lips—"because he let them do as they pleased. He lived upon the proceeds of his English estate, and so he lived in peace; but allow for a moment, for argument's sake, that he had not been the fortunate possessor of such a fund of riches. What then? Which, may I ask, do you think he would have preferred: seeing you, not to speak of himself, in want of clothes, food, education, amusements, and so forth—or taking measures

to convert an unprofitable property into a paying estate? Pooh! excuse me, but young ladies were never meant to be politicians; their talents lie in other directions altogether. When Colonel Blount appointed me his agent, I saw what a task was likely to be mine. I determined to go through with it, unswervingly. I *am* doing so; and see, I sit by moonlight with opened windows! I refuse a guard, feeling sorry that I did not do so from the very first. To show fear is to encourage the ruffianism we want to put down. I stand in dread of *nothing*. Miss Bright, I am your most obedient servant. What can I do for you?"

Honor glanced upwards at his sternly smiling face, hardened, as it then was, by the discussion upon which they had entered—glanced at it, and felt that her cause was lost. She hung her head in deep dejection.

"Will you do as I have asked you: stop the warrant for Will Cree's arrest?" she murmured, rather than said.

The agent stroked his chin with a thoughtful hand, but there was no look of relenting upon his face.

"You plead for a most unworthy youth," was his reply, "and I must, of course, surmise that you do so with the object of obliging some other who has commissioned you to intercede for him. He is one of a rare bad lot, constantly hanging about with fellows who will, in a very few days, be in the hands of the police. No, Miss Bright! I am sorry to refuse you, but I should not be doing my duty were I to do otherwise.

"I am not saying anything in praise of him," said Honor, very quietly; "I do not pretend to think otherwise than that he is in bad company, and a bad boy—but I am sure if you knew the circumstances, and how much depends upon your answer, you would not refuse. I am not at liberty to speak with entire freedom to you, but you may accept my solemn assurance that you will be amply justified in taking the step I now ask, and I once more entreat of you to have the warrant stopped."

"But by so doing I shall be going in direct opposition to the law, which I am bound to uphold," said Mr. Jessel, moving his chair a shade nearer hers, and gazing at her as he again sat down.

"The law will suffer less by letting him go than by detaining him!" said Honor, with great significance; and there was a moment's intense pause. "I am really very much in earnest," went on the girl, speaking in tones which showed the sincerity

of her words. "If you will do this for me I shall be everlastingly obliged to you, and, believe me, you will not be sorry for it by-and-by."

"And what assurance have I, may I ask, that he will certainly leave the country?" inquired Mr. Jessel, with his handsome eyes still fixed upon her face. "These fellows make promises in plenty, but they are not to be depended on. Deception is their trade; they learn it with their alphabet, and are adepts at it before they are grown up. How can I be certain that he will really go, or that he will not do further mischief if he does?"

"I will promise for him," said Honor, steadily. "Stop the warrant, and he will be gone on the third day from this."

"You are keeping me entirely in the dark," said Jessel, in a vexed tone; "I cannot imagine what this scapegrace can be to you, that you should take so keen an interest in him."

Honor's head drooped.

"He used to shoe our horses when we lived at Nutley," she replied. "He was a favourite with my darling. I cannot help pleading for him."

"You are the sweetest pleader in all the world," said Mr. Jessel, with sudden passion, and drawing so nigh her that she rose up trembling from her seat; "make *me* but one promise—one I have often asked of you: say you will be my wife, and you shall demand what you will of me: I will grant it! One little word, which I am waiting and longing for, and this boy shall go free; I will send and have the warrant stopped to-night."

"You are ungenerous to seek to bribe me," said Honor, with frigid coldness, yet with flashing eyes; "you know that what you ask can never be. There is no use in even touching upon the subject. If young Cree's fate must depend upon my changing my resolve, then he is doomed! and some other may possibly be so also. May God help us all!" And she gathered her shawl about her, with a foreboding sigh.

The agent stooped his head upon his breast, in disturbed and angry thought. It certainly did appear most strange that a girl so bitterly reduced should obstinately reject the proposals of a man such as he. There was something he could not understand, something he wanted to fathom, yet could not, and he chafed and fretted because that something baffled him. He turned round upon her, almost fiercely, as she prepared to depart.

"I know I have no right to ask you any questions," he said, with bitter earnestness, "but I cannot help myself, though

perhaps you will not answer. In pity tell me, are you engaged to any other?"

"I am not!" was her steady reply.

"You love another, then?"

"That is my concern only," she responded; "you have *not* a right to ask. Now, I am going. Tell me, once more, is there any hope for Will Cree?"

"Stay a moment," he answered; "there may be. Is your dislike to me"—and he came very near her as he put the question—"founded upon that unfortunate carriage incident which occurred the evening I fetched you from Nutley to Dr. Tenterden Jones's house? I believe it is. You have never forgiven my presumption, or found an excuse for it."

She flushed crimson at the recollections which his words conjured up.

"You ought not to ask me these things," she exclaimed, writhing her shapely head; "it is wrong, or, at all events, unfair. I do not believe that I dislike you, but—but—I shall never marry anybody! *never*, whilst I have life! Tell me, I repeat, is there any hope for Will?"

"Is there any hope for *me*?" he answered, gazing passionately into her eyes. "If 'yes' in one instance, 'yes' in the other. Let the first be even *but* a hope, deferred so long as ever you may please to defer it; the other shall in such case be a certainty, not deferred at all; a reality, to be accomplished to-night."

Seeing that she paused, and mistaking the meaning of her hesitation, he stretched forth his arms, and strove to draw her to his breast, but she turned from him with a gesture of unmistakable dissent.

"Have I your only answer—your final one?" she inquired, in a low but firm tone.

"My final one," he repeated. "Yes! Give me but a hope, say that it may not be always 'No,' and I swear to you that what you have asked of me shall be done, without question or comment. I will forego my sense of duty, do what I know to be wrong, go dead against my own inclinations, and against the law, for one little assurance from you that my cause is not altogether lost. One word from your lips shall decide my fate—and Cree's! The syllable that binds me for ever captive shall set him free at once. Yes or no shall decide! Let it be 'yes.' You will not regret it in the future,"

She turned deadly white as she answered:

"*One word*, to have such influence! Then let it be 'No,' for both! but, remember, Mr. Jessel—I have warned you that——"

"That Cree is a dangerous villain," he said, finishing the sentence with a heavy frown upon his brow. "Yes, you have; thank you! He shall be taken at once, as I meant that he should be, before you came here this evening at all. Miss Bright, is there anything further that I can do for you."

"Nothing," she answered, sorrowfully; "I had hoped something from your mercy; such hope is for ever gone!" And, gathering her veil hurriedly about her face, she had passed from his presence ere he could utter one detaining word.

That night Sheelah Nest sobbed herself to sleep in Honor's pitying arms; and her lover, Will Cree, attended another meeting in Brown's barn, and received his instructions concerning the carrying out of "the next job."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MRS. TENTERDEN JONES was busy, very busy. Her soul was in arms, and her arms were engaged with sole, which she was washing, scraping, filleting, flouring, and frying with an ardour indicative of a capability to perform great things. They were indeed such wonders of culinary art as would have astounded Soyer or Brillat-Savarin.

Yes; Mrs. Tenterden Jones was desperately busy. "All of a fuss," as she herself declared. The loud-tongued clock in the hall had not yet chimed the hour of eight; nevertheless, the good lady was fairly up to her eyebrows in important work. The scene of her labours was the kitchen, and, so briskly was she bustling about in discharge of them, that the aggrieved slavey—with nose a good deal elevated, and a good deal blackened, by the way, too—was leaving her mistress entirely to her own devices, and regarding with scornful unconcern the liberal preparations for a breakfast of more than ordinary magnificence.

Early though it was, Mrs. Tenterden Jones was dressed: very much dressed, indeed, except about the bosom, which was open, and displayed a cable chain with a saucer-like locket attached to it. She wore a crimson silk gown, somewhat spotted about the front breadths, and displaying symptoms of weakness at the shoulder seams, but very gorgeous, nevertheless. The "body," as Mrs. Tenterden Jones termed it, was studded all the way down with brass buttons, like nail-heads on a coffin, and the skirt was turned well up in front about the wearer's substantial figure, and was pinned crosswise at the back, leaving the "trail," as the slavey irreverently called it, to waggle after her when she walked. to the exuberant delight of two young kittens, who sat upon it and got jaunts for nothing, after the manner of naughty street-boys who occasionally do likewise upon the hinder portions of vehicles driven by unsuspecting cabbies.

So busy was Mrs. Tenterden Jones, and so fragrant presently grew the smell of cooking from the front kitchen, in which apartment the interesting experiments were going forward, that even the wayside beggars—always on the alert pretty early—became attracted by it, and the rascally old poodle with the shaven legs, led by or leading his still more rascally old master with the patched eye, came and planted his begging-cup right at the window, to the righteous indignation of the long-suffering domestic, who forthwith fired it right off the sill, like a shot from a high-class rifle.

In the drawing-room was one of the Miss Tenterden Joneses, and in the parlour was another, sweetly clad in well-starched checked gingham, somewhat short and a little faded, but very charming and nice; frilled pinafores, and plaited tails, elaborately tied with red furniture binding, and oiled until they shone. In the hand of each young lady was a very big silk handkerchief, such as Dr. Tenterden Jones was in the habit of making use of when he had a cold in his nose, which was very often—and these they were busily utilizing as dusters, blowing all the while like young grampi, and laying about them with marvellous energy and zeal.

The girl in the parlour had apparently quite the best of it, for, the breakfast being laid, with the exception of the luxuries which were in course of preparation below, she was making the most of her opportunities, and varying the monotony of her employment by occasionally picking at the bread, purloining lumps of sugar, sipping the contents of the cream-pot, tasting the preserves, inserting the honey-spoon in her mouth and returning it to the dish in a state of high polish, breathing indiscriminately on everything which the table contained, and performing a variety of other tricks of a juvenile and harmless nature.

To do her justice, she was not too utterly selfish, for after a while she considerably exchanged duties with the youthful virgin who was employed in the room overhead, thus affording that young lady a fair opportunity for exercising her individual talents in the same direction—a kindness which was highly appreciated and made use of to the best possible advantage.

The third Miss Tenterden Jones was engaged in prosecuting a less interesting employment: her occupation consisting of a continuous running up and down stairs, from the kitchen to the state-room of the establishment—one which was set apart as the

family guest-chamber—listening at the door of this palatial apartment, and then darting down again to report to the fluttered dove in red silk that the occupant of it had not yet begun to move about.

The doctor himself comes next for mention. He was, if truth be told, a nonentity in general in his own house, and, as a rule, sat quietly with an extinguisher on him, snuffed out by his wife's superior light. Mrs. Tenterden Jones's treatment of her lord was indeed far from reverential. When not completely sitting upon him, she occupied herself in utilizing him for her own ends—pushing, shoving, pulling, despatching, sending him hither and thither, shunting and dragging him about, just as though he were luggage, and she a railway porter in charge. In short, one was in constant expectation of seeing her produce a paste-pot and brush, smear Dr. Tenterden Jones with the latter, and stick a label on him with the intention of sending him *in toto* to the right about.

Such being generally the state of things, it is marvellous to have to record that on the morning in question the little gentleman was distinctly cock of the walk. He no longer sat beneath the depressing shade of the extinguisher, or opened his mouth to remonstrate against the luggage-system, the label, or the shrewish tongue. On the contrary, he stood erect—he walked—he fairly strutted, as he perambulated the gravelled footway which led to the garden at the rear of his dwelling, and strolled leisurely up and down, smoking his morning pipe, with a tasselled-cap on his head, and a self-complacent smile on his usually dejected face. Truth was, the little doctor had been the hero of an adventure, and had, for once in his life, done that which his wife considered a good thing; something, in short, which had, for a wonder, met with her entire approbation. He had dined out the previous evening, had left early—which was his custom since he had suffered from a certain acute fever some months previously—had been caught in a terrific thunder-shower when driving homewards in his gig, had overtaken a traveller plodding through it along the road, had ascertained from him that he would have many miles to walk in order to find a place of shelter for the night, and had impulsively, half fearfully, but wholly humanely and hospitably, invited him to accept a seat in the gig, and a bed at his (the doctor's) house.

Now, although this was a proceeding which, under ordinary circumstances, would have brought disastrous consequences

about Dr. Tenterden Jones's ears, and although his own temerity caused him to shake like an ague patient all the way up to his hall-door, and to meet his wife with a very deprecating, "My dear, I *hope* you won't be vexed," etc., he had no sooner announced privately to that irate and flannel-robed lady that the guest whom he had picked up by the way was a distinguished member of the British Army, and an acquaintance of their friend Mr. Jessel's as well, than there was an immediate turn of the tide in the doctor's favour, for Mrs. Tenterden Jones was quite as enthusiastic on the subject of red coats as was Lady Kissie herself, and very nearly as desirous, likewise, of showing favour to the handsome agent who ruled over Colonel Blount's estate.

She had, in fact, a strong predilection for the military—owing, as she was wont to declare, to so many of her own relations having been "army people." This sounded very well indeed, and the good lady never failed to pass over the fact that her statement, if analyzed, would have turned out to signify that her youngest brother, after breaking the windows of the neighbours, the hearts of his family, and the greater number of the Ten Commandments which Moses took so much trouble to write on two tables of stone, had finally enlisted in a walking regiment, and been bought out the following week with money which had been laid aside for the purchase of finery to deck the persons of herself and two plain-looking sisters at a forthcoming county ball. This taste of the Army, coupled with the indisputable fact that her great-aunt on the mother's side had married a militia major, who suffered from boils, and wanted some one to nurse him, was all that Mrs. Tenterden Jones could in reality boast, but her love of red was so insatiable that even Mr. Jessel in his hunting-coat was an object of adoration, and history recorded that, when the postmen first put on blue, Mrs. Tenterden Jones looked that colour herself for such a length of time that it took three excursions to Dublin and a whole month at Ramsgate to restore her to her normal condition.

Under these circumstances it will scarcely be wondered at that Mrs. Tenterden Jones's preparations for breakfast were on the most elaborate and magnificent scale. The eggs she broke into the frying-pan were of the freshest, the coffee sweetly roasted and a liberal supply put into the pot, the kromeskeys *almost* as good as those to be had at the big London dinners, which poor Mrs. Tenterden Jones often strove sighingly to picture to herself.

"Because," said Mrs. Tenterden Jones, as she adroitly turned an omelette in the pan, "military men like things nice; me uncle the meejor always did. They don't care for slipslops!"

Very aggravating and disappointing was it, therefore, to the excellent lady, to find, after all her trouble, that the guest—when at length he descended—showed but little appreciation of her labours, and but very little appetite for the unwonted delicacies prepared for the gratification of his particular tastes. In short, he behaved as though "a buster of a breakfast" were not by any means a novelty to him, and glanced somewhat curiously once or twice at Mrs. Tenterden Jones's glazed and heated visage, as though totally oblivious of the fact that labouring on his account had been the means of making it adopt so unbecoming a guise. He ate but sparingly, appeared wrapped for the most part in gloomy or anxious thought, listened abstractedly to his hostess's frequent allusions to the gallant "meejor," seemed quite unconscious of occasioning her confusion or embarrassment by inquiring to what regiment the deceased officer had belonged, and in place of adjourning to the drawing-room after breakfast, and loitering away the morning hours in scanning photographs, discussing military subjects, hearing the three young Tenterden Joneses play over their last new lessons on the piano, and replenishing their money-boxes (always surreptitiously introduced to the notice of unsuspecting visitors), he ungratefully took an abrupt and disappointing leave, pleading absolute necessity as his excuse for doing so.

"Well, I'm sorry you can't stay," said Mrs. Tenterden Jones, very gorgeous in red silk and grease spots, and thrusting forth a large foot to display a rosetted shoe of huge proportions. "I'm really sorry your visit should be so short, for—I'm not ashamed to confess it—I've a great love for the Army, so many of me own people being connected with it; and I'm sure you've eaten no breakfast whatever; and I was hoping you could have stopped, if only for half an hour, just to hear my second play over the first of a juet she's learning with her sister. An excellent governess they have now—quite a lady—a member of one of the old county families."

"I'm sure, ma, she's nothing of the kind," struck in the youngest scion of the household, who, having had fewer advantages with reference to the honey-spoon than either of her sisters, was less disposed to be sweet; "she lives in a common

farmhouse : we passed it by the other day—and she dresses so badly, too.”

“Hold your tongue !” cried Mrs. Tenterden Jones, pushing the offending infant behind her in a desperate hurry to get her out of sight. “I assure you, Colonel Devereux, the young person I speak of is highly respectable, but reduced ; her guardian broke his neck in this very house ! I mean they brought him here when it was broken. Go out of the room, children, this minute, and don’t dare to laugh when I’m speaking to the colonel. They ought to be better behaved”—very apologetically, as the trio went giggling from the apartment—“for they have every possible advantage. We spare nothing on our children ; they have the best always.”

Derrick politely intimated that he was quite assured of the veracity of all she said, and, having expressed regret at not being able to remain for the proffered “juet,” shook hands gratefully with his hospitable hostess, and, escaping swiftly to the hall, entered the doctor’s buggy, which was waiting by arrangement at the door.

“Good-bye, good-bye !” said the little man, stretching up for a last shake at his guest’s aristocratic hand. “Don’t hurry the mare, and she’ll travel far in the day : and, remember, I don’t want her at all for the rest of the afternoon, not a bit—faith and word ! So drive her just wherever you want to go.” Then, speaking softly that his wife might not hear, he added : “Remember, I can’t be sure, I couldn’t swear it, because the fever was on me at the time ; but, as I told you last night, I’ve had it on my mind that it *was* the case, for, when I got up and looked for it, the deuce a bit o’ the thing was there at all ! And the missus never laid a finger on it, that I’ll take my oath. ’Twould have been out long ago if she had.”

“What was all that whispering about ?” asked Mrs. Tenterden Jones of her lord, as he returned to the hall, from whence she and her unruly olive-plants were looking inquisitively forth ; and on his face came a startled and dejected expression. It was evident that his glory of the morning had departed.

“What was it all about, I say ?” reiterated Mrs. Tenterden Jones, growing hot with curiosity and excitement. “What did you mean by saying something was ‘not the case’ ?”

“I—I—really can’t remember saying those words, my dear,” bleated the poor little doctor, dejected at being thus suddenly brought to task ; “I don’t believe I said anything of the sort.”

"You did!" contradicted his wife. "I shall put those children on bread and water if they laugh at their mother in this way. You did, I say; I distinctly heard the word 'case.'"

"A case of instruments, my dear, which was under the cushion!" panted the aggrieved practitioner, catching frantically at a straw; "that was it. I thought he might sit upon it, and perhaps get hurt, or—or—make a squash!"

"That's a fine story," said Mrs. Tenterden Jones, suspiciously. "I believe a lot of it, too, of course! Go along!" And she began to trundle him, like luggage, along the passage, at the end of which one always expected the paste-pot and label to appear.

"Thank you, my dear," said the little man, meekly; and he accordingly "went along" as directed—namely, through the narrow corridor which led to his study, or surgery, where he remained in dismal solitude for the remainder of the forenoon, with the extinguisher on, completely snuffed out.

Meanwhile Derrick drove the buggy leisurely forward, with the doctor's merry-faced servant seated by his side, only too anxious for conversation. Occasionally the young man seemed to forget his instructions, and in place of taking the mare easy, sent her along for a few yards or so, until the voice of the redoubtable groom, muttering, "Begorra, it's sayin' a prayer she'll be if you dhrove her like that!" recalled him to a sense of what was due to the animal, and made him regulate her to an easy pace.

Very silent was Derrick during that lonely, country drive; not a word did he utter, though the merry-faced servant—with a freedom engendered by long and faithful service—sought many times to draw him into discourse. On his face was a dark, unreadable shadow, and about his firm mouth determined lines were drawn, as though some strong resolve had entered and taken possession of his mind.

As they reached the cross-roads and struck into a by-way, which was a short-cut to Nutley, and would take in Mr. Jessel's house, a man in an oilskin overcoat (it was threatening rain at the time) appeared walking along by the hedge-row, and, glancing sullenly up as the buggy went by, gave a sort of half salute to the groom who sat by Deverill's side.

"Begad, now, and that's a quare thing!" exclaimed the merry-faced servant, turning in his seat, and looking back; "that boy walkin' abroad, bold and all, as he's doin', and the police hot foot afther him, as they say they is. He was as

dacent a lad twelvemonths ago as there was in all the county Galway; many a time he shod that mare that your honor's dhrivin', and was a raal favourite with the quality all round, and, whatever come over him at-all-at-all, he tuk up with a lot of low blagyards, an' is gone to the divil entirely, savin' your honor's presence."

Deverill involuntarily touched up the mare a little with his whip, as he spoke for the first time.

"Oh, a farrier?" he said, thoughtfully. "I fear I have not quite followed what you have been saying. Did you mention his name?"

"I did not, your honor," replied the groom, "but, sure-an'-faix, there's sorra secret about it. His name's Cree. Will Crée, they calls him."

"Cree!" repeated Deverill, as though struck. "Yes, Cree. Thank you, I saw his face well as we went by."

"Sure, an' it's easy enough seein' any o' their faces," said the servant, laughing a little grimly; "divil a taste o' crape or disguisin' are they puttin' on now at-all-at-all. They walks as bowld to their work as if they was proud of it, and there's not a *boheen* in the counthrey won't be open to shelther them when it's done. There's a gentleman livin' close by here, on your honor's left, an' they've been *burnin' him in elegy*, they calls it, all over the whole o' the land. He's a friend o' the mather's, too; but they'll do for him—the boys will—as sure as to-day's Friday. Not a pistol will he carry, nor a taste o' protection will he have about him. Here's his house now: we're just comin' up to it, an' all the windas open, an' the gate an' all, like as if he was livin' in different times altogether.

"I'm going into this very house for awhile," said Derrick, pulling up. "You can walk the mare about until I come out. I sha'n't be long, I hope."

He got out, and the servant, changing to the seat he had vacated, shook the reins upon the mare's neck, and, having moved forward a step or two, suddenly turned the buggy and began to drive it slowly back along the road they had come. Deverill paused, and looked at him.

"What are you doing that for?" he called out; "that's a bad bit of road. You might just as well have kept on ahead."

"There's a cow a-grazin' there that sometimes frightens the mare!" called back the servant, touching his hat to show respect, but still determined to do as he chose himself; "I'm all right, your honor!" And he held on his stolid way.

The words he had spoken concerning the house were true : windows and gate were alike open. Deverill passed through the latter without let or hindrance, glancing curiously through the former as he approached the porch, and was welcomed rather than forbidden by the nondescript watch-dog which was stretched at lazy length upon a mat. Nobody was to be seen, so he walked in.

A gaudy canary fluttered a little in its cage in the hall, and an impudent rough terrier uttered a bark—inconsistently wagging its apology for a tail at the same moment. These sounds denoting the coming of a visitor, the old butler came forward from a door at the back, and smiled cheerily as though in recognition.

"Mr. Jessel probably expects me?" said Deverill, very gravely, and by no means reciprocating the smile; "he appointed to see me this morning."

"He is waiting for you, I think, sir," was the reply; and going before the visitor he knocked at the door of the room in which Honor had been received the previous evening, and, after a brief colloquy with somebody within, threw it wide open, and bade Deverill enter.

Mr. Jessel, who was the sole occupant of the small apartment, got up from a desk which was strewn with ledgers and papers, and without attempting any welcome, or even volunteering to shake hands, politely pointed his visitor to a seat.

"You wish to see me?" he said, hurriedly: "you waited a long while for me last night. May I ask of what service I can be to you?"

"None to me," responded Derrick, regarding him with marked coldness, and seeming to take no pleasure in the beauty which set so many ladies' hearts a-beating. "You *may* be to one in whom I am interested. We shall see. In the first place, carry your memory back to a day last spring—early in May, I think—on which you drove along the high road to Galway, on a car drawn by a white horse, in company with a man who wore a wig, and two armed policemen. Do you remember?"

"Perfectly," replied Jessel, looking fixedly at his questioner, and evidently listening attentively to every word.

"Good. You will recollect, perhaps, that when not very far from Nutley a traveller on foot met you, and he laid up his hand to your driver to stop. Do you follow me so far?"

"So far," repeated the agent, drumming with a pencil upon

the table before him, but never removing his eyes from the face of the man by whom he was addressed.

"Good," said Derrick, again. "Do you recollect that the traveller warned you, if you valued your life, not to go a certain road, as danger was waiting for you there; and you thanked him, and said you hoped to meet him again? You were under an obligation to him; and you felt it. Does your memory still follow me?"

"Still follows you," repeated Mr. Jessel, in almost mechanical tones, while his eyes, keener than ever, seemed literally to glue themselves upon the young officer's unflinching face.

"You might or might not know that man again," said Derrick, steadily, "but I am he, although the absence of any head-covering, and a change of clothing and so forth, may possibly make a difference. Do you recognize me?"

"Perfectly," replied the agent. "I did so all along. I am not a man to deny an obligation, and I am ready to admit that, in a worldly sense, I owe one to you. What is to be the barter? Be quick, please. I am tied for time."

And he drew forth his watch, and laid it upon the table.

"I shall not detain you," said Derrick, without one particle of tremor or embarrassment in his tone, "longer than I can help, but you may as well put up that watch, for out of this room you shall not go until I have said my say, and got what I want also."

Mr. Jessel smiled. He was too bold a man himself not to admire boldness in others, and he looked with something almost akin to respect at the stalwart figure, and handsome, resolute face of the gallant young soldier.

"You have first to tell me *what* you want," were the only words he uttered.

"That is easily done," responded Derrick. Then, speaking very slowly and distinctly, he added, "I want the scrap of paper *that you took from Doctor Tenterden Jones's desk* during the time he had the fever, through which you were in constant attendance upon him."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERY closely were the eyes of the speaker fixed upon the countenance of the man to whom he spoke, but if he expected to see any change of colour or expression on that stolid face, he reckoned entirely without his host.

The astute agent had not served a forty years' apprenticeship to the world and its many snares, for nothing. Perhaps, too, he might not have been taken quite so much by surprise as his interlocutor imagined; he might have guessed the nature of what was coming, for he certainly manifested little or no astonishment, or any sort of palpable disturbance. For one instant—one only—a slight nervous twitching of the hand which still beat the pencil upon the table was observable, but it passed as quickly as it appeared.

"Pray go on," he said, very quietly. "Is there anything else you require?"

"There is," responded Deverill, boldly. "I require all the proofs that are in your hands concerning Miss Bright's parentage. As Colonel Blount's agent you have had the overhauling of a large quantity of papers which his predecessor left behind. Some of the most important of these are in your possession. I want you to give them into mine. The article which you took from Dr. Jones's desk was the most important of all—*as you know*. I need not tell you what it was."

"Nevertheless I should like to be told," said Mr. Jessel, suavely. "Pray be seated; there is no necessity for standing."

"I prefer it," answered Deverill, shortly. "The paper I want from you is the certificate of marriage between Miss Bright's mother and her late guardian and father, Mr. Bright of Nutley Grange. It fell from the breast of the dead man during the medical examination of his remains. Clearly he had always carried it about his person, perhaps in sentiment, perhaps with the feeling—who knows?—that this proof of his child's legitimacy ought not to be parted from him. Dr. Jones saw it,

took possession of it, and hid it away for purposes of further inquiry. He himself was ailing on that day, although his wife was seeing company at the house; his illness developed into fever; you were constantly by his bedside during the time, and learned—probably from his ravings, if not from his actions—that he had something of importance concealed in his desk. You went to it and took it! Do not attempt to deny all this. You know that what I say is true.”

Whilst Derrick was speaking, the fine eyes of his listener never wandered for a moment from his face, nor did the pencil for a single instant cease its steady beat, beat, upon the table at which the accused man still sat, with his back to the widely-opened window, from which a small portion of pleasure-ground could be seen, in the centre of which was a somewhat battered-looking garden-god, mounted upon a pile of fern-decked rockery, shadowed towards the back by clumps of overhanging trees.

There was silence for a moment or two, Deverill growing manifestly impatient.

“Have you no answer to make me?” he suddenly blurted out. “Do you deny that you have such a paper as I have just described?”

The agent still looked steadily at him, and his pencil beat on.

“Were you as old a lawyer as I am, Major Deverill,” he replied, “you would bear more accurately in mind that a prisoner’s counsel does not, as a rule, prepare his defence until he has ascertained the amount and nature of the evidence likely to be arrayed against his client. Now, I—as a prisoner in my own study, which you say I am not to leave until I have done certain things—am my own counsellor, and therefore wait to learn the evidence against me. Such a course is fair, you will allow.”

Deverill regarded him with a vexed and troubled look. The calm courtesy of his manner annoyed him. He would rather have had a bull-dog exterior to encounter, than a sleek feline, whose very touch was velvet, until the sharp claws should come to be revealed.

“Fair, if you choose to call it so,” was his displeased rejoinder. “For my part, I call nothing ‘fair’ that is not straightforward. Again, then, do you deny that you have the paper I am demanding?”

“Acting as my own adviser, I prefer not pleading in the

dark. State your evidence. You have accused me of a very grave offence. Where are your proofs?"

"I have the word of those who saw you," was Derrick's rejoinder; "you were watched. Now plead!"

"May I inquire—it is quite fair that I should—who watched me?" asked the agent, looking very fixedly at his accuser, and breathing hard, despite his giant efforts at self-control.

"Certainly, I have no objection to tell," was the response. "The man whose desk you pilfered is the witness against you."

Mr. Jessel half-rose from his chair with a muttered exclamation upon his lips. This portion of the evidence was clearly unexpected, and occasioned astonishment impossible to suppress. It passed in an instant, however, and he sat down, calm again.

"You mean," he said, "that Dr. Tenterden Jones accuses me of investigating his desk, and purloining from it a paper of very vital importance?"

"The accusation comes from me, not from Dr. Tenterden Jones!" was Derrick's thought-out rejoinder.

"But he saw me do it?"

"He saw you do it."

"And yet made no sign?"

The fine eyes, calm but glittering, were still fixed searchingly upon the young officer's face, and, as he uttered the last five important words, Deverill winced somewhat, and looked for an instant disconcerted.

"He was too ill, I should think, to make much exertion," was his response; and Mr. Jessel laughed a little, for the first time.

"Not a bit too ill to have sung out, had he chosen to do so," he smilingly observed. "In short, Major Deverill, I may tell you—for the purpose of ending our interview—that you have come here, assuming knowledge which you do not possess. Great secrets have, no doubt, been from time to time wormed out by that clever tactic, *pretending to know*. You have tried it very well with me, and I admire your boldness, even in dealing out affront—but I am too old a bird to be caught in any ordinary trap. You must fashion one of a different sort—something novel that has never been used before—ere you can hope to snare me. You have tried to make me believe that a man in a raving fever was capable of watching the actions of those about him, and of noting and remembering them when he got up; also that this same Dr. Tenterden Jones, believing me to have acted as you say I did, has since received me with cordiality at his

house, and has come to mine as a guest. I am sorry to say I cannot believe all this, and am therefore ready—without meaning any rudeness—to wish you good morning. I am leaving home this afternoon for a few days, and am somewhat pressed for time.”

He rose as he spoke, and began passing his hands among some papers which lay upon the table before him, as though to remind his visitor that other matters were awaiting his attention.

Derrick stood for a moment confounded. He had indeed been playing a bold game—one which only the desperate nature of the case he had taken in hand would have seemed in any wise to warrant, but he had played it in ignorance of the nature and temperament of the man with whom he had sought to deal.

That signal defeat should thus follow was a bitter blow to him, and he cast about among his ideas how best to play the only solitary card which yet remained in his hand. It rarely takes a soldier long to make up his mind, or arrive at a conclusion, and a moment in this case was sufficient. Taking a firm step forwards, he said, in low but steady tones,

“Grant me five minutes further, Mr. Jessel, and I shall not trouble you again. I confess that to gain my point I have pretended more actual knowledge than I really possessed. I shall now deal quite openly with you. It has been my belief for some time past that you were in possession of certain facts which were of the utmost importance to Miss Bright; lately this belief has been confirmed. I came here last evening to appeal to you to give them up. Circumstances so fell out that you did not see me, and I left, promising to come again this morning. As I passed the window of this room on my way to the gate, I heard, to my utter surprise, the voice of the young lady for whose benefit I was striving. I paused a moment to make sure, and in that moment overheard a portion of what was passing within. Mr. Jessel, we both love this girl, you and I; you see I make confession for myself, in order that *you* may not feel embarrassed by my knowledge of your secret. She will never marry either of us. She has rejected me, as she has done you, but we are both bound, as men, to do all in our power to eradicate the wrong which she has suffered, and to establish her in the position she ought to hold. Half an hour after I left you last evening, Dr. Tenterden Jones overtook me on the road, and with true Irish hospitality brought me home to his house. As we passed Nutley he spoke of its late owner, and of Miss

Bright, who is at present acting as governess to his children. I opened my mind to him then, and told him with what object I had been calling upon you. Instantly he told me the story of the missing paper, but he certainly did not *accuse you*; you had been constantly in the room, he said, during his illness, and he fancied (raving, perhaps) that he had seen you at his desk. Anyhow, the thing was on his mind, and when he got up and had strength to look for the paper, it was gone. He asked you about it, but could gain no information, and so, unable to come to any conclusion, he allowed the matter to drop. On hearing this tale, I asked him whether I might make use of it, and received permission, on certain conditions, which I have tried not to infringe. I had a desperate game to play, and I thought to gain my end by affecting to be wiser than I really was. That *ruse* has failed, and so I have now only to apologize, and appeal. Tell me what you know, and on my honour as a gentleman I will use it for no purpose except to benefit Miss Bright; or tell me nothing, and by your own free act—yours alone—do justice to the girl who is so shamefully wronged.”

There was something so touchingly earnest in the manner and demeanour of the young soldier, that a nature many degrees more hardened than that of the man to whom he addressed himself must have been impressed, if not actually moved, by his appeal. Mr. Jessel paused, with a troubled and gloomy look; and in that moment, Derrick, who stood facing him, or nearly so, seized him with startling suddenness by the shoulder, and dashed him aside with such violence that he fell at full length upon the ground, while at the same instant a loud report rang through the air, and a hurricane of shot rained through the open window, passing over the precise spot where a moment before the two men had been peaceably standing—and clattered through wall and furniture with a startling and thrilling sound.

“Don’t rise, for your life! creep to the door and shout for help!” cried Deverill, excitedly. “I saw what was coming in time to save you.” And, springing through the window like a young deer, he darted past the grotto and the garden-god, and dashed into the thicket of trees that flanked them in the rear.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was a bold step for a man unarmed to take, for the would-be murderer had fled that way, and could not be more than a few paces off, even if not lying in ambush with the intention of standing on his defence. The branches, thick and heavy with their weight of summer foliage, crashed behind him as he burst through their leafy shade, and a startled rook or two flew out with a noisy scream; but no sign of human life was visible, and the pursuer paused, and glanced anxiously about him. On the left, a little pathway terminated with a summer-house, which a glance sufficed to show was untenanted save by an affrighted cat, which, with stooped body and uplifted tail, stood glaring about her in the doorway. On the right was a continuation of the pathway, leading probably to a side gate or garden entrance, while in front ran a hawthorn hedge, with here and there a stake or two thrust irregularly through it, and beyond lay a broken expanse of meadow and pasture-land, submerged in many places by recent rains, and showing no signs of life or motion in any direction.

Perceiving that there were traces of footmarks along the muddy pathway which extended to the right, Deverill ran rapidly in pursuit of them, and was confounded to find his way stopped at a corner by an overturned wheelbarrow, around which a quantity of garden rubbish lay scattered, while one or two heavy branches, still covered with leaves, had been dragged as though designedly across the narrow footway, forming a wide obstacle, and entirely arresting his path. If the assassin had paused in his flight to do this—an hypothesis most improbable—he was certainly a cool villain; if not, some confederate had done it, or the obstruction was not in any way connected with the crime, and the criminal had got off some other way.

Putting his famed agility to the test, Deverill, after a moment's consideration, finally leaped the barrier—a pretty formidable one—and, having thus accomplished a feat which few would

have attempted, sped along for a few yards or so, and finally found himself, to his disappointment, directly in front of the house, at a distance of some hundred feet or thereabouts from it, and only shaded from the windows of the dwelling by a light growth of trees. In another moment or two he was standing at the entrance gate, with the high road stretching to the right and left of him, and not a solitary soul in sight, or any sound audible save the drip, drip, of the gently-falling rain.

Enraged and discomfited, the young officer turned again towards the pathway which led to the house, and was about to wend his way thither, when the sound of horses' hoofs smote his ear: first indistinctly, then coming unmistakably nearer, and finally, after a brief delay, the doctor's mare and buggy came in sight, travelling slowly, the mare dead lame, the reins hanging about her feet, the whip standing up in the rest, the vehicle empty.

Astounded and puzzled by this strange apparition, Deverill sprang into the roadway—and the tired beast, dragging the buggy slowly and with effort along, came to a complete standstill, and looked mournfully at him, as he approached and gathered up the reins. It then became evident that the poor animal had been subjected to most inhuman treatment. Her body was bathed in sweat, and covered all over with marks of severe punishment; her knees were swollen and bleeding, where she had fallen upon the flinty road, while from one of her sore feet, which she held tenderly up, the shoe had fallen, and a sharp stone lay embedded in the frog.

Taking the reins over his arm, Deverill led the mare quietly forward, looking for the entrance to Mr. Jessel's yard—which, after a brief survey, he perceived lay up a short byway or lane, down which at the moment a mounted messenger came galloping fast, followed immediately by another, who carried a rifle in his hand, and looked like a stableman hastily turned out. Neither of them paused to say a word to Derrick, but both pointed backwards to the yard-gates, which stood wide open, and were surrounded by a group of men, one of whom ran eagerly forward. He proved to be the doctor's servant (no longer merry-faced, but very materially sobered, and white as any sheet), and poured out the information that a man had come up to him "just without," had dragged him from his seat in the buggy with a pistol to his head, had jumped in and galloped the mare away, another man scrambling into the vehicle a few perches up the road.

If this story were true, which seemed probable enough, the assassins had either been spilled out upon the roadway by the fall of the animal which they were over-driving, or they had only driven the vehicle far enough to get well out of the way of the police-barracks, and had then jumped out, and gone on on foot. The boldness of the proceeding was only in keeping with that which had characterised one or two crimes of a very recent date, the failure in tracing which was every day more and more regarded by the murderous fraternity as an encouragement for the prosecution of their misdeeds.

"Did you see the faces of these men?" inquired Deverill, as he curiously scanned the servant's blanched, but seemingly truthful, countenance.

"I did not, your honor," was the reply. "The man that caught hold o' me had some disguise on him, and a muffler about his jaws—and the other, the one that got in up above, kep' his back turned all the time. You see, they were desperate, your honor; for, if they met the police on foot, they were done for, but the doctor's trap's so well known that not one sittin' in it'd ever be suspected, no matter how fast they drove; and I seen them draggin' off their mufflin' as they batthered away down the road."

"One of them was Cree, of course," said Deverill, confidently. "I will swear it was his face I saw above the gun that fired the shot."

"Your honor may swear, and welcome!" returned the servant, removing the harness in a sort of mechanical manner from the injured mare; "but, for meself, I'd as lief say nothin': leastways, till the police comes round—and they'll be here now, in a jiffy."

"I should like you to tell me why you turned the buggy this morning, when I got out of it," said Deverill, stooping to examine the animal's disfigured knees. "I saw no cow on the up road."

"No, she ain't always there," replied the servant, flipping away a horse-fly; "but, when she is, there's ructions! and so I didn't want for to try."

"I suspect you turned round to have a look at this Cree, or a word with him," said Deverill, eyeing the man closely.

"The police'll be round presently, your honor, answered the servant, flushing a little for the first time; "they'll take down anything your honor says, or suspects." And he led the

mare sulkily to an upper portion of the yard, while the men who were standing about looked askance at one another, and strolled off in different directions.

"I believe you all know more about this business than you choose to acknowledge!" exclaimed Deverill, suspiciously; and, without waiting for any reply, he walked with hasty steps towards the house.

In the hall, Mr. Jessel met him. The agent's face was very pale and stern, but he was otherwise as calm as though nothing unusual had occurred. Signifying to Derrick that he wished a word or two with him, he preceded the young man to the room in which their former interview had taken place. The window had been shut close down, in the interval that had elapsed; otherwise there was no alteration visible. Mr. Jessel stood on the rug, with his back to the fireplace; Derrick close by him—hatless, as he had been throughout the pursuit, drenched with rain, and flushed with excited anger.

"Major Deverill," said the agent, and his tones were calm and slow, "I were indeed less than human, did I refuse to acknowledge my gratitude—deep, earnest gratitude—to the man who has twice saved my life, and has now bravely risked his own in the effort to trace my assailant. I *am* grateful to you; and, when I ask you to shake hands, I do so with the assurance that the hand I offer you is utterly clear of the dishonourable action of which you, with a laudable motive in view, accused me a while ago."

With warm, frank ingenuousness, he extended his hand to his preserver; and Derrick, with a sudden rush of kindly feeling, such as generous natures are apt to experience, and never fight against, grasped it with a heartiness which showed how complete was his belief in the sincerity of the man with whom he stood face to face. Going quietly to a cabinet, which he unlocked, Mr. Jessel took from it a sealed envelope of considerable dimensions, and placed it in Deverill's hands.

"You shall do as you will with this," he said, a slight huskiness perceptible in his voice. "They are papers which I found in the late Mr. Bright's *escritoire* at Nutley, and they will go far towards establishing Miss Bright as heiress to his possessions, even naming her such in a will (unfortunately unsigned) which is here enclosed. Had I told Colonel Blount of my discovery, I need not say what would probably have occurred; he believes her to be actually base-born, and has no real idea that I know

anything to the contrary. I confess I kept these papers by me in the hope that I *myself*, under happier circumstances, might have established her rights beyond dispute. That is all past now, and to you I resign them. Of the marriage-certificate of which you have spoken, I *know nothing at all*. During Dr. Jones's illness, he once or twice left his bed, and searched through an old desk which was in the room, being with difficulty persuaded to leave it. One night he got up while I dozed, and I just awoke in time to see him hide something away between the leaves of a book, which stood third, I think, or fourth, upon a shelf close by his bedside. I have no doubt it may be there still; you can ask him; I should never have thought of it again but for the accusation brought against myself. His suspicion of me was one of the hallucinations peculiar to the fever from which he suffered, and is therefore heartily forgiven. Now, a word more. I ascertained, only a few days ago, that the woman Hester Bright, whose letters you will find in this packet, is still living—or was then—but had removed from Philadelphia to New Jersey. You will find the address amongst the papers. I confess I have been to blame in keeping such knowledge as I possessed secret, even for a time, but better and wiser men have resorted to just such artifices in the hope of eventually winning the woman they cared for, and repeated rejections served, I suppose, to harden my heart, which would nevertheless in the end, and that perhaps a speedy one, have seen wrong righted. I will give all the assistance I can in a legal way towards the object you have in view, and hope you will always assure Miss Bright that, however hardly she may think of me, I had her future interests in view when I took possession of papers which, had they fallen into other hands, would have been consigned to the flames."

He paused, paler than when he had begun to speak, and Deverill eagerly seized the opportunity to say,

"You talk, Mr. Jessel, as though you believed Miss Bright and I were likely to be closely associated in the future. I assure you on the word of a gentleman that such is not the case. Speaking with the candour which you have used towards me, I tell you again that I am among her rejected suitors. Now, the police are here; they will have a great deal to say to both of us. I suppose it was known that you intended leaving home this afternoon, and so the attempt was planned for this morning, before the hour for your start,"

"I suppose so," answered the agent, dreamily ; and with a heavy sigh—not, however, for the danger through which he had passed—he threw open the door, and bade the inspector enter.

Things turned out peculiarly that day. By the time Derrick's evidence had been taken and a vehicle got ready for his conveyal to Nest Farm, Honor was far away from that sylvan spot, engaged in hammering learning into the heads of the three Miss Tenterden Joneses ; and it so fell out that, as the doctor's house was the very next place to which the young officer drove Mr. Jessel's showily-stepping grey, the trio of young ladies darted to the front window at the sound of wheels, flattened their three noses in a quite unnecessary manner against the glass, while their three plaited tails vibrated with delight, and their six lean legs kicked joyously out from the same excess of feeling—and announced with sundry squalls and screamings to their governess that "Colonel Devereux," who had slept there the night before, and for whom their ma had put on her red silk and served up luxuries for breakfast, had just come back again.

A considerable time was Mr. Jessel's showy grey compelled to wait for Derrick at the doctor's hall-door. First, there was a lengthened interview to be gone through with the little man himself, and that it proved to be of a satisfactory nature the faces of both showed, as did likewise the doctor's concluding words, spoken at the door of his surgery in an impressive whisper :

"Well, I'm sorry for the old mare, and for the whole occurrence. It's most shocking ; but, by Jove, I'm so glad about the other thing, I have positively no room for much thought about anything else ; and I hope, my boy, you'll go in and win, for she's a charming girl, and the missis here and I will always be glad to see you and her, in our own humble way."

Then there was an interview with the "missis" to be encountered, for she was waiting in the hall, resplendent as ever, to seize upon the visitor like a spider lying in wait for a fly ; and the whole events of the morning had to be recapitulated to her, and a dreadful luncheon partaken of, at which the three Miss Tenterden Joneses gorged themselves with the dainties left over from the breakfast, and at which also Honor appeared—quiet, and tall, and black-clad—sitting demurely between two of her pupils, and dragged at by them for second and third helps of everything upon the table, while she listened in silence to the discussion respecting the attempt on Mr. Jessel's life, and

longed, with all the yearning of her young and desolate heart, to steal even one glance at the face of her idol, who sat opposite, and who stole so many at her that the tempting viands which Mrs. Tenterden Jones heaped upon his plate remained disregarded, and her stories of the gallant "meejor" fell upon pre-occupied ears. It would have been far pleasanter, he thought, to have sat upon the kitchen table at Nest Farm, alone with Honor—even though he might have had to drink milk by the quart, or black draught, or cod-liver oil, or any other abomination which his soul loathed—in place of enjoying the festivities of Dr. Tenterden Jones's table. Not a word in private would he have had with her at all, had it not been for the tact and *finesse* of the host, who first called his spouse out of the room to tell her that of course the occurrence of the morning would detain their guest in Galway—that he had telegraphed to headquarters for more leave—and that, although he had promised Mr. Jessel to return that evening, it was quite possible that her persuasions might induce him to remain where he was, and she had better, therefore, see that the guest-chamber was again put in readiness for the young officer's reception.

This grand stroke being successful, the admirable little man again put his head into the dining-room, told his three daughters that there was a bag of sweets on the table in his dressing-room which was quite at their disposal, and, having seen their half-dozen legs scampering up the staircase like so many rockets, finally shut the door upon their governess and her supposed lover, and went off chuckling to his study.

That night the constabulary, scouring the country in all directions, found the body of Will Cree lying crouched in a ditch, not more than a mile or so from Mr. Jessel's house. He was quite dead, one of his legs was broken, some ugly cuts were upon his face, a six-chambered revolver lay beside him, and a bullet wound was through his heart! His companion was never traced, nor could any clue to the mystery of his death be obtained, but, as the doctor's verdict was "Died by his own hand," an intelligent jury subsequently brought in the same, and it was surmised that the overturning of the vehicle in which the men had been seated had brought Cree to grief, while his associate had escaped unhurt—that the ill-starred young man had crept, or been dragged, to a secluded place, there to await help—and that whilst lying alone he had heard the approach of the mounted police, and in dread of being taken had put an end

to his ill-spent life. There were those in the country, however, who said in whispers among themselves that it was Murtagh who had been with Cree, and that when he had seen how injured the "boy" was, and unable to fly, he had dragged him to an adjacent field and there remorselessly shot him, partly in rage for the failure of the act which he had been deputed to accomplish, and partly in dread lest, being, as his coadjutors believed, a coward, he should turn Queen's evidence, and bring a good many of them to trouble.

On the night on which Cree's body was discovered, Deverill wrote the longest letter he had ever penned in his life, and addressed it marked *Urgent*, to Bet; and Honor, watching over the troubled slumbers of Sheelah Nest, recalled every word and sentence of her too brief interview with Derrick, and in a tumult of thought, wonder, and earnest hope, nevertheless found room for marvel (knowing as she did how well he loved her) that he had made no effort to renew their troth.

CHAPTER XL.

MORE than a month had passed away. Summer was gone, and autumn reigned russetly in her stead. Very soon now the chill breezes would begin to blow, and the first chrysanthemums would meet the last lingering dahlias in the garden beds.

It was fine weather yet, however—very fine, and Honor sat in her little chamber at Nest Farm, with the window wide open, and the sweet pure air stealing pleasantly in. Through it also came sounds that breathed of peace. The swish of rustling leaves that quivered in the breeze, and rattled pleasantly against each other and against the old window-frame, anon tumbling down in yellow and brown profusion, not a bit ashamed of or sorry for their fall, but dancing about upon the ground, as though in high glee at finding themselves at liberty to career hither and thither over the well-strewn expanse. There was the sound, too, of distant cattle; of sparrows in the roof; of rooks soaring from and again subsiding into the elm-trees near at hand—and yet another also: a sound that seemed to bind the rest together, and to measure out the time to them—telling of labour, yet giving an added measure of repose to the restful quietude of the listener—a sound clear as a bell, and true in time as the progress of the village clock. It came from the blacksmith's hammer, ringing upon the anvil at which poor misguided Cree had often worked; and every inch of air through which the sound passed added its tribute of tune, as the note went by, and sent it in through the open lattice in matchless, ringing melody.

There was a healthful smell of smouldering weeds, and of crisp, russet autumn leaves, such as one often perceives in the country at the fall of the year. There had been the same on the day of Honor's last interview with Derrick, when he had ridden over for a brief visit to the farm, before returning to the duties from which recent stirring events had detained him. How well she remembered it! His words, full of kindness, yet of mystery also, shadowing forth in dim outline the things which

had since been revealed; and how he had implored her, with averted face, to think favourably of Mr. Jessel. Of this latter part of his conversation she would rather not have thought at all. Was it the wafted-up perfume of autumn things which made her do so? Perhaps it was, for of all the gates of sense there is not one that gives such rapid access to the storehouses of memory as does this one of smell. It may be that, because it is so rarely made use of in connection with the functions of the mind, its power is the greater when it is. The associative part of our imagination is used to being appealed to by the hearing and the sight, but it does not expect such appeals from the smell, and hence, perhaps, its greater influence. There are few who do not know what long-forgotten things some scent, such as that of pressed violets or autumn leaves, will bring to mind! With what force they strike the memory when brought in this way in contact with it.

Honor had not been idle during the weeks that had passed away since that last meeting with Derrick. Even though she knew, or had been told, that circumstances were leading up to important changes in her life and fortunes, she had, nevertheless, continued as though no such prospect had been in view. Her studies were as diligently prosecuted as ever, her pupils as carefully instructed, the manners and education of the Misses Tenderden Jones as conscientiously looked after as formerly. In short, no duty was suffered to remain neglected; while at the farm her ministrations had been productive of the happiest results. Never wearying of assisting her foster-mother with the labours which occupied so large a portion of the good dame's time, she had likewise succeeded in calming down the frenzied grief which for a while had utterly prostrated the hapless Sheelah, and had gradually brought her to a state of resignation and contentment which promised after a time to give place to one of cheerfulness, if not to the old happy light-heartedness of former unclouded years. Everybody was the better for her strivings. Wherever her footsteps went they carried peace; wherever her voice was heard, it calmed the most troubled waters. The purpose of her life was to effect good, and lifting up her pure heart in gratitude for the promised change, of which so few were yet aware, she prayed the while that, if disappointment were to follow in the steps of Hope, she might be prepared to meet it with calmness, and accept a life of labour and privation in place of the looked-for one of luxury and repose. Sitting alone now

in her quiet little room, she drew forth some letters, and, spreading them before her for the fiftieth time at least, carefully read and weighed every word that they contained. One, which was dated some three weeks back, and seemed to command the largest share of her attention, ran as follows:—

“Monticello Avenue, Jersey City.

“I am sure, Honor dear, you must have thought me quite as mad as folks say I am, when I darted in upon you that day—just a month ago now—at Nest Farm, and rushed away again, after a hurried hug, without telling you a bit about where I was going, or what I meant to do. The truth was, I thought you'd have stopped me—or rather, have tried to do so: for no power on earth—not even your persuasions—could have kept me then. However, Derrick will have told you ere this (for he promised he would, when I should have fairly started) that I have come out here to seek your mother; and that I have found her you will also know through Derrick, to whom I wired results at once. In fact, dear, it is through him entirely that I have set to work, although *for* you. He could not possibly have managed to get leave to come out himself, and so it was an arranged thing between him and me that I was to do everything that he could not. Now, before I go further, I have to tell you that he advanced me fifty pounds; because I hadn't a penny of my own, and don't suppose I ever shall have again. He would be awfully angry if he knew I told you this, but I never conceal anybody's goodness; and, as for repayment, why, *you* can offer it by-and-by, when things are settled; but I expect something else will be settled by that time, and that you and he will be having all things in common; so it won't be much of a bone of contention—will it?

“Well, to go on. All those letters which Hester Bright wrote from Philadelphia to Nutley, and which Mr. Jessel found, were of course headed with her full address. Mr. J. found out, however, that she had long since left that place, and had settled in New Jersey, where he managed to trace her pretty accurately through an agent, and consequently had his eye upon her, in readiness for a revelation, whenever he should choose to make it—a proceeding which helped to lighten *my* labours very much. Well, dear, as you know, I found her out, and, after a very affecting scene, heard the confirmation of what we had gathered from those letters, which had been hidden away so securely that nobody short of a genius (such as Mr. Jessel certainly is) would have dreamed that such a receptacle could be in existence.

"Your father, it appears, had met and loved her when a very young fellow going through his studies at Cambridge, and during his own father's lifetime too. She was—as many knew—a 'lady born,' and so forth, but was at the time in a subordinate position, owing to the extravagance of some who ought to have been able to have done better things for her. Young Bright knew well that such a marriage would not be heard of at home—for I need not tell you what 'Irish pride' means—and yet he loved the girl, and would not treat her badly; so he married her. After a year or so, you were born, and were naturally a source of tremendous difficulty to the young people, money and experience being two things sadly wanted by both. Just at this crisis, or thereabouts, the elder Bright died, and your father—who was at home for vacation at the time—had written to acquaint his wife with the news, and to say that he should soon be in a position to make their marriage public, when he received a letter (one which had crossed his) telling him that, although she had married him, she had all along been attached to another man—some titled villain he turned out to be—and was going away with him that very night. She would not do so, she said, despite her affection for him, were it not that she felt more keenly every day the burden which she and her child were upon her young and fortuneless husband—and people had begun to reproach her, too, and altogether things were so miserable, that, for his sake, as well as her own, she was going to end them by taking the step of which she told him. Her fault, she said, had lain in her consenting to enter into a marriage with him at all, but he had persuaded her, and she had not known at the time that the other cared anything about her. She was leaving you, she wrote, in charge of the woman with whom she lodged, and enclosed him therewith the certificate of her marriage, together with the wedding-ring, and some trifles that he had given her—and she begged of him to care for you, and to forgive her for what she was about to do.

"This letter was amongst the papers afterwards found in the escritoire at Nutley. Now I can hurry on. Your father—heart-broken, of course—travelled at once to Cambridge, heard the confirmation of the story from the woman in whose charge you had been left, brought you back with him to Galway, placed you with Mrs. Nest to nurse (leaving her to think what she pleased), and, after you had grown a bit, brought you to live with him at Nutley. Not wishing to make his disgrace—or rather his wife's—a thing for people to talk about, he told all inquirers

(and there were not many, for he lived very secluded then), that you were a child who had been left destitute by one whom he had valued, and that, having nothing to love or live for, he had adopted you, in the hope that you might fill the vacant place. You bore his own surname from the beginning, and he called you 'Honor' when the old minister christened you at Nutley Church, in the hope that you would live up to the sweet name. That it was his wish that your legitimacy should never be questioned, and that you should be his heiress in the event of his death, was testified by his jealous preservation of the marriage certificate, as also by the fact that at the very time when Fate overtook him he was engaged in the preparation of a will—also extant, though unsigned, leaving all that he possessed to you, his child.

"Derrick may or may not have told you that your mother's fate was the usual one in such cases: a year or two of false happiness, then coldness, followed finally by desertion. She has supported herself by needlework for seventeen years, steadily sending back every help which your father, in his pitiful and kindly nature, forwarded to her from time to time, and only writing to him occasionally for tidings of you: which, she says, he faithfully granted. A few of such letters from her fell into my father's hands shortly after Mr. Bright's death, and from their tone of humility, and the remorseful terms in which they were couched, led him—and, indeed, all of us—to believe that you were not the adopted child of a friend, but his own natural daughter. Mr. Jessel alone knew to the contrary, and he, as you are aware, reserved his knowledge in the hope of eventually gaining an influence over you. To Derrick's bravery and exertions you are indebted for all that has since come to pass.

"Your mother, I may add, is a handsome and intelligent woman; and, although poor, is not without comforts, and seems to be much respected here—where, of course, nothing is known of her history. She speaks of you with the greatest feeling, but positively refuses to come to England, unless absolutely required—and is, I ought to tell you, engaged just now to be married to a man of good position in Toronto, who will, she says, make her a suitable husband, and place her above all possibility of want.

"I have only to add, that on learning these particulars I at once wrote them to my father, who was preparing to travel with his wife, and I expect them here in a few days. He threatens to disown me for the part I have taken in bringing hidden things to light—set on, of course, by his wife to do so—but

I cannot help it! I have done my duty by him to the very last straw, and to do it by you was the next task which Providence set me. My wants in this world will not be many, and I daresay there will be a corner found at Nutley for poor old Bet (as Derrick used to call me), and a spot in the old kirkyard to lay her bones to rest.

“Now, don’t think that I mean dying at once, for I don’t. I am ever so much better for the voyage out here; and when we meet I shall have lots to tell you of things less important than those of which I have been writing. I travelled per *Germanic*, one of the White Star Company’s splendid ships. She is, indeed, a ‘bonnie boat’—an Ocean Queen in every sense of the term—four hundred and seventy feet in length, and five hundred and eight tons burden. One hundred and sixty men are required to man her, and we were in all close upon two thousand souls on board, yet there was not the least overcrowding, or any sort of confusion. Every arrangement was absolutely perfect on board that floating palace. Fancy, she averages fifteen and a half knots an hour, yet her motion is so easy you could almost imagine yourself on dry land. The saloon, a splendid apartment, is quite beyond my powers of description, and on the main deck amidships is the music and drawing-room, with excellent piano and capital library attached. A number of people played and sang, and there were concerts on board for the benefit of the Liverpool Seamen’s Orphan Institution, established in 1869 for the support and education of the children of seafaring men of all religions and nationalities. You may fancy there is ample call for funds when I tell you that in less than thirteen years no fewer than fifty-six thousand one hundred and seventy-two seamen died in English ships abroad, and that of these thirty-three thousand six hundred and fifty-two were drowned. This number does not include those who died in the United Kingdom. Well, the music at these extemporised concerts was said to be very good, and all the cabin passengers who had voices, or could play, took part in them; but you know, dear, *I* wouldn’t know the ‘National Anthem’ from ‘Patrick’s Day,’ except I were in Old Ireland, where the cheering might decide me about the latter.

“Some of the passengers amused me greatly. I did not know which to be most diverted with: the vain old lady who—when some antediluvian on board said he remembered her father, a fine old man, sixty years ago—exclaimed in agitated confusion that it might be so, but he (her father) had been dead *many*

years before she was born; or the vainer *young* lady who fell in love with the ship's doctor, and always fainted away whenever he was near enough to catch her. He grew tired of it at last, or people quizzed him, for one evening, when she fell all of a heap upon his shoulder, he just laid her down on deck and deluged her with water. To see her jumping up and shaking out her fineries would have made you laugh for a week; and her face so red, too, from mortification and anger, because a lot of us were laughing. Then she went in for the purser, Wahlers, his name was—one of the nicest fellows I ever met—but he was too 'cute; he wouldn't have her at any price, though she flung herself at his head when the doctor snubbed her. She might have been a *protégée* of Lady Kissie's! I was delighted with the arrangements for the comfort of the intermediate passengers on board, and was quite sorry Derrick had made me swear to go cabin—they all looked so comfortable—though, for the matter of that, so did the steerage folk. You should have seen Derrick's face when I proposed coming out as an emigrant among these latter. It would have saved money, and done me quite as well. He is a capital fellow, and you are a most fortunate girl—if you would only think so. But there, I won't quiz you, as I can't have the pleasure of seeing you blush. *Adieu*, till next mail.—Your affectionate

“BET.

“P.S.—Mr. Jessel has, to my utter astonishment, just arrived, ready to befriend your interests in every way, and to take care of me back to Europe, in case I should be left without any other protector. He is handsomer than ever, but very pale and grim. The meeting of Wellington and Blucher was nothing at all compared with that which will be between him and my father when they stand face to face with one another; especially if the fair Helen is posted as rearguard, with instructions to fire small shot.

“Yours again,

“B. B.”

There was another letter, bearing a slightly later date, over which Honor spent many further moments of reflection. It was likewise from Bet, was very short, and merely stated that Colonel Blount had arrived, and was, at the moment of writing, engaged in interviewing the widow of the late Mr. Bright of Nutley, in presence of Mr. Jessel, whose coolness and precision were beyond all praise. Mrs. Blount had travelled out with her husband, but, having suffered much on the voyage, had

happily stopped at New York with her maid, and had permitted her lord to complete the journey alone—a proceeding calculated to facilitate matters in no ordinary degree. A postscript was hurriedly added: “Interview ended. Have not spoken with father, but hear from Mr. J. that no opposition will be offered. Evidence beyond question or dispute. Step comes on here to-morrow, and we leave for Europe per *Adriatic* at end of week.”

Honor laid her arms upon the table, and buried her face upon them in silent thought. A great purpose was in her heart—something she longed to do, that she believed would be right, and that would, she knew, bring peace to her own heart and joy to another. But had the time come to do it? Not quite, she feared; and yet so very nearly that there could be no harm—rather the reverse—in making a beginning. Lifting a flushed and happy face from its concealment, she drew forward pen and paper, and hurriedly—as though fearing to pause—wrote off the following note:—

“When I ended our engagement, it was for your sake, because I believed myself to be a shamed and nameless girl. You know by this time how far my supposition has been disproved, and what my future is likely to be. You have loved me well—and love me still, *I know*—even as I do you, with all my full heart. Your pride, which I have wounded, is keeping you from me. Come! I await you: never to wound again.

“The same now, as before we parted,

“HONOR BRIGHT.”

With cheeks that tingled with happy blushes, Honor sealed and addressed her letter; not to be sent immediately, though she longed to send it, but to await the course of events. She felt all the better for having written it—easier, and more contented that it was done; and, as she laid it aside with joyful hopefulness, she went to the open window—against which the russet leaves were quietly tapping, and through which the sweet autumn smell was deliciously stealing—and stretched her longing, yearning arms in the direction of the dear home of her youth—soon, she prayerfully hoped, to be hers again; hers to live in, to die in, to bestow on whom she pleased.

Suddenly she paused, spellbound; the smile died from her lip, the gladness from her heart; a surprise, a terror stole over her, and she drew back and closed the lattice, as though to shut out, and shut herself in, from something which she greatly feared.

CHAPTER XLI.

To all outward appearance there was nothing in view which need have occasioned her any alarm, although the sight which she beheld, and which kept her rooted to the spot from whence a view could be obtained, was certainly an uncommon one—something very rarely witnessed in that quiet country district, where even a passing carriage was an object of attraction, and a lady, on foot or horseback, was a sight most rare to see.

A gay party appeared coming down the road. Two of them were men, Honor thought, and she could see that the two in front were ladies. Closer inspection served to convince her, however, that only one man was amongst the lot, and that it was a female who stalked by his side, although to know this would have been difficult, had it not been for the abbreviated petticoat which showed slightly from beneath the coat she wore. The two foremost pedestrians were Lady Kissie and Mrs. Westombury, the latter quietly and suitably attired in a country suit of grey—the former resplendent in roseate colours, all silks and laces, with a coquettish little rose-trimmed hat upon her head, a rose-decked sunshade protecting her complexion, and a huge bunch of the same sweet flowers—which looked wonderfully real, but might not have been—nestled in close proximity to her rosy cheek. She was picking her way daintily through the dust and scattered leaves as she came along, and turning occasionally to converse in laughing tones with the two who walked behind, one of whom, Honor saw with a qualm, was Lady Mog Wickham, her hair cropped shorter than ever, her jerry hat set further back, her high collar and long cuffs more aggressive, her voice louder, her cigar longer, her stride more manly, her whole appearance—and that of her bulldog, who followed her with bleared eyes and battered body—more rakish and disreputable, and more utterly unlike anything to be met with in ordinary life. She wore a light brown overcoat, buttoned all the way down; her left hand was stuck in one of the pockets, and her right twirled a Malacca cane.

The man by her side was a stranger—at least to Honor. He was old—seventy, or thereabouts—but was well made up to conceal his years. His face was clean shaven, except for a small, cleverly-dyed moustache; the dark hair which curled crisply beneath his white hat was not his own; the eyebrows which overhung his bold searching eyes were indebted to art for their colour, arrangement, and gloss. He was tall, and slightly stooped; his step wavered a little as he walked, as though a stick would have been a comfort and support; but he minced along without any such assistance, and the hand which ought to have grasped one, held instead a long string of light blue ribbon, at the end of which was Lady Kissie's pug, very fat, very hot, very miserable, waddling along with an aggrieved air, as though it had never before in all its life been compelled to travel on foot over a dusty country road: a thing which, in all probability, it really never had. The man who was leading it was of just that type from which refined women, such as Honor, shrink with inexpressible repugnance. That he was suited to his companions, and they to him, was palpably apparent.

As the party approached the house, Honor saw, with a feeling of unutterable annoyance, that they were not only reconnoitring, but actually meant coming in—some of them, at all events; for, while eight curious eyes scanned every door and window, Lady Kissie laid a bold hand upon the gate, and pushing it wide open, so as not to soil or crush her voluminous fineries, entered with a jaunty step, whilst the remainder of the quartett awaited the result of her inquiries. Things might, then, have been worse after all. They were not all about to come in—at least, she hoped not. But what on earth did they want with her? or what had brought them there at all?

With her hand pressed upon her heart, she stood anxiously watching and waiting. Approach the window she dared not, but it was easy to imagine what was going on below—and presently the nodding of three heads, and the slow departure of the trio down the road, told that Lady Kissie had been admitted and that her friends meant to await her coming out. Bad enough it was, in all conscience, but less objectionable than if Lady Mog had launched herself upon her—dog, cigar, and all—or Mrs. Westonbury, who, despite her elegance, was painfully associated with terrible recollections of the night on which Colonel Blount had entrapped her into assisting him at cards—his grand *coup* for urging her into the acceptance of Sir Tittleum

Tibbs' suit—nor could she well have borne the honours of an introduction to the leering old gentleman who was acting as dog-leader for the vivacious Vine. Yes, things might certainly have been worse: unless, indeed, they all meant to come back, which perhaps they did, as soon as her ladyship should have cleared the coast; and in view of this possibility Honor set herself to think, for the first time since she had been at Nest Farm, how many chairs there were in the kitchen—and then, 'twixt horror and laughter, to picture Lady Mog drinking buttermilk from a delf bowl, while Lady Kissie guarded her skirts from the sheep-dog, and the antiquated Adonis found a seat upon the settle, and pulled at the fat pug when it strove to get at the chickens' food, which the good dame was fond of leaving upon the floor to cool.

There was quietness below for a few moments, only the murmur of voices being discernible, and then Sheelah burst in, in a state of high excitement, cheeks burning, eyes all aglow, a look of delighted surprise upon her pretty face. Honor blessed any chance, no matter how unpleasant to herself, which made her young foster-sister look even temporarily like the bright, gladsome Sheelah of old.

"Oh, Miss Honor, dear!" exclaimed the girl, breathless in her eagerness to tell—"there's the *loveliest* lady below stairs askin' for you! A princess she might be, every inch! Such satins, and such shoes, and such a gorgeous, splendid hat, and her hair shining under it, like gold; and such eyes, and such a sweet voice! Glory be to goodness, why do rich ladies ever die at all, when they can look like that? I don't know who she is, Miss Honor, but she said I was to say a friend wished to see you, and might she come up here, or would you rather come down and see her below, and I hope it's the last you'll say, for I'm sure mother an' me would never be tired of lookin' at her, and hearin' her speak."

"Nevertheless I think she had better come up to me first, Sheelah dear," returned Honor, kindly; "I will go down with her again by-and-by. It is Lady Kissie. She *is* very pretty indeed."

"There, now!" exclaimed Sheelah, throwing up her hands at the mention of the high-sounding title. "Didn't I know she was something grand? And she is as humble as anything, Miss Honor, shook hands with mother, and praised *me*, though I've only my old frock on"—glancing half-vexedly at her clean

homespun—"and there she is now, sitting so lovely, nursing the sick chicken, and telling mother how much she loves the country, and the cows, and the pigs, and everything. So innocent like—and beautiful!"

"Very, indeed," responded Honor, repressing an amused smile; "well, Sheelah, if she will walk up here when the cow-and-pig conversation is over, she will find me ready to receive her."

Sheelah went, a little unwillingly. She had evidently thought and hoped that her foster-sister would have seen "the grand lady" in the ordinary family sitting-room—otherwise the kitchen—which was a sort of inner snugger, beyond and separated from the big common structure in which the farm labourers usually took their meals. It was a great disappointment to think that so much exquisite beauty, attractive dress, and general sweetness should be allowed to vanish up a narrow staircase, entirely out of sight of her admiring eyes. Yet so it seemed destined to be, and Sheelah sighed regretfully as she went downstairs, while Honor prepared for the coming of the visitor by arranging her letters and papers tidily upon the table, drawing the blind partially across the window and seating herself with her back to it—taking care to place the most comfortable chair which the room afforded in readiness for the expected comer.

Not very long had she to wait. A rustling of silks, an odour of rare perfumes, and the patter of diminutive shoes, announced the approach of the dainty beauty, who came in with arms extended, and proceeded to salute Honor on both cheeks.

"I'm so glad to see you again, dear!" were the first words she uttered, as she paused, holding the girl's passive hands, and surveying the tall, lissom figure, so plainly clad in black cotton, with only a band of white around the throat—an exact contrast to her own festive habiliments. "So very, *very* glad! and I've got such a lot to say to you, and to hear from you, that I positively don't know where to begin. Oh, this chair is for me; thank you, dear! Now, if I *might* have the pillow from your bed, just at my back, I should think it so comfortable. Thanks: *that's* it. Well, now to commence—how are you? I've not seen you since that dreadful fever. Quite strong again? *that's* right. What a lovely, healthy place this must be, and what a dear old lady your hostess! so devoted to the pigs, and fowls, and things. I should love her, I am sure; and that pretty girl,

too, with her spinning-wheel, and her hair down her back ! Well, child, where do you suppose I am stopping ? At Nutley, actually ! Are you surprised ? ”

She was indeed, but her tutored face did not betray her. A sudden qualm, as though a raw spot had been suddenly touched, shot through her heart, and thrilled through her entire being. Instantly, however, it was suppressed, sense and proper feeling coming swiftly to the rescue.

Nutley was not hers yet—had not, at least, been so acknowledged. Then, what right had she to feel jealous of any use to which it might be put ? Ah ! what right ? Vain sophistry of reasoning ! As if she were not jealous of the very winds that blew about it, the birds that sang in the trees surrounding it—the insects that buzzed about its ivied windows. She hung her head for a moment in very shame that such bitterness should be in her heart ; but raised it the next to say,

“ A little surprised, perhaps : yes ; but I hope you are enjoying your visit. It is a pretty place.”

“ Ye-s,” hesitated her ladyship, with a doubting shrug ; “ pretty enough, I suppose ; but, you see, we have only just arrived, and I have not yet had time to become acquainted with its beauties. Horribly full of insects, it seems to be ! I found a vile brown thing, with a scissors at the end of its tail, crawling on my hair-brush this morning ; and an odious, fat caterpillar walked up the toilet-table while I was dressing. Ugh ! I hate crawlies of every kind ! And then the birds make such a horrid noise in the mornings : one can’t sleep.”

Noise ! It had ever been to Honor the sweetest music. She smiled involuntarily, and passed it off by saying, “ You have not been accustomed to country life.”

“ No, I *certainly* have *not*,” said Lady Kissie, decisively ; “ and it is quite funny how I have come to be here at all. You know I had a Thames villa for a while this summer, and some very pleasant people staying with me ; but, when they had to go, I found it dull, so joined Colonel and Mrs. Blount in Leicestershire, and, when chatting one day about Nutley, it came out that I had never been to Ireland ; so they offered me the use of the house when they should go to travel. It seemed rather funny, and a novelty ; so here I am ! I have brought Mog Wickham down with me, and Mrs. Westonbury, and the Duke of Mufton, expecting a little amusement and variety, but—what do you think ?—this very morning comes a letter, for-

warded to me from England, from Colonel Blount, covered all over with American post-marks, saying that, if I had not already started for Nutley, I had better not do so, as the place was actually yours! His wife had told me, or rather written me, a sort of outline or sketch of what might possibly come to pass, but the thing had not been looked into at the time, and so I had no idea until this morning that your claim had been proven, without law, and that there was not any intention of disputing it. Colonel Blount does not affect to care very much, but I know it must be a desperate blow, for they are as poor as church mice: squandered all they had, and launched out into every sort of extravagance of late, on the strength of their new riches. 'Set a Beggar on Horseback,' my dear! You know the old proverb. I don't believe, you know, that *he* regrets Nutley one bit; the place was always a worry to him, and a loss; but the Leicestershire estate was a nice fat little income to fall back upon, and the losing of it will cause a fearful cutting up."

Honor looked down, her heart beating almost wildly, but not a word issuing from her slightly quivering lips. She had lifted a favourite cat upon her knees, and was engaged in stroking its sleek fur, while it purred audibly.

"And now," said Lady Kissie, after a short pause, during which she arranged her laces and her draperies, and otherwise plumed herself like a vain bird, "you can, I suppose, guess what has brought me here to-day. It is to offer you any number of apologies for being so unceremoniously located in your house, and to ask permission to remain there for just a day or two longer, on account of these people whom I have invited down. The duke is so fond of shooting, and fishing, and all such things, that I should be dreadfully unwilling to have to ask him to go away at once. Do you mind—or *shall* you, dear—if we stop just a little bit longer?"

Honor lifted her eyes, and looked calmly at her supplicant as she replied,

"So far as I am concerned, Lady Kissie, you and your friends are quite welcome to remain at Nutley as long as you find it pleasant to do so. Whatever my claims may be, I waive them until Colonel Blount and Mr. Jessel shall have returned and substantially made out and acknowledged my right of possession. Until then, nothing is mine: except what my labours may bring me."

"I am sure you are a perfect angel," exclaimed Lady Kissie, jumping up, and kissing her with such warmth that the favoured tabby was startled, and made a claw at her ladyship's tinted cheek. "And when you take possession of that sweet place in Leicestershire, I shall be charmed to come and stop with you now and again, and to bring some nice people, too, to cheer you up. In fact, we shall be very jolly! I always thought it a dreadful pity to see those Blounts standing in your shoes! He is a most odious man in every respect, and, though his wife is a good-hearted woman in her way, she is awfully bad style, and selfish, too, at times—dreadfully selfish! Yes, I shall like immensely to come to your English establishment, when you get settled there. We shall be great friends, you and I."

And she kissed and hugged again, until the tabby clawed her hat off, and sent her hurriedly to the unpretentious little mirror for the purpose of fixing it on.

Honor gasped for words, as if choking. Evidently there was something which she did not want or wish to say, yet which should come out, despite her efforts. And out it came, with a hurried rush, while the lips that uttered it grew crimson, in sympathy with the rest of the sweet face.

"Lady Kissie," she said, speaking very fast and low, "whatever hospitality I may be privileged to offer you at Nutley, be assured that to Knotty Cross I cannot bid you or others welcome. It may not ever be mine. I mean to ask Colonel Blount to retain it—for his lifetime—and am sure he will not refuse to gratify my whim. I have never cared about it; never wished at any time to go there. With Nutley my whole heart is entwined."

Lady Kissie paused before the mirror—her hat only half arranged—her face positively pale through its coating of artificial bloom.

"Well, I never!" was all she seemed capable of ejaculating. Then she flung herself into her chair again, and fanned herself vigorously for fully five minutes. "Are you really in earnest?" she at length inquired.

"Perfectly," responded Honor. "I do not believe I have ever spoken in haste concerning such serious matters."

"Well, you *are* a fool!" burst out her ladyship, and fanned herself again.

That she had been one herself in making such hasty love to a girl who would, after all, be nothing whatever in the social scale,

evidently struck her with unpleasant force, and made her feel hot with mortification and rage.

"Are you aware," she said, sharply, "that you can be nothing short of a beggar if you mean to depend upon the proceeds of Irish lands?"

"I shall not beg of anybody," was Honor's quiet response.

"Then you will have to continue teaching!" exclaimed Lady Kissie, decisively, "and to live on bacon, and turnips, and sour buttermilk, and—and—potatoes and oatmeal broth! And what is to keep up the house, I wonder? It must go to ruin, and be always in dirt, for you won't get servants to stop with you without wages, and not a tenant on this place will ever pay. They just do as they please—every one of them."

"They will pay *me*," responded Honor, with a vivid glow upon her pure cheeks. "I have no fears about that."

"And you actually mean," said Lady Kissie, still incredulous, "that you intend to give up all you have (that is worth anything) to a man who would have ruined you?"

"I shall strive to forget everything, except that I once loved him, and that I lived in his house and ate of his bread," answered Honor, steadily. "Nutley is of more worth to me than ten thousand Knotty Crosses!"

"The man," went on Lady Kissie, disregarding her speech, "who would have sold you for a few paltry hundreds! Who insulted you by word and act! who ended by killing your favourite dog! who——"

Honor put up her hand with a warning gesture.

"Hush!" she said; "*hush for ever* on such subjects. I have tried to forget, and shall *still* try. Do not remind me. This interview is very painful to me, Lady Kissie! Pray let it be ended, or let us speak upon other matters. I do not really mean to be discourteous"—for her ladyship had risen up, huffed—"please sit down again, and tell me of people I want to hear about. What news of Sir Tittleum Tibbs? He acted like a gentleman by me, and I feel bound to ask for him."

"Oh! he's right enough," answered Lady Kissie, tapping an affectedly careless foot on the uncarpeted floor. "The same as ever, I fancy, giving good dinners and suppers to men, as a rule, and seeming to care nothing about women. He'll never marry, that's a certainty! I used to think it was a mistake on his part ever to have thought of such a thing as matrimony, but I am of a different opinion now. Single life is lonely if it lasts too long.

I believe I shall marry myself one of these days. Duchess of Mufton, how would that sound? Excellently, I think. The duke is vastly attentive to me, I can assure you, and I should certainly take him, were it not for this absurd engagement with Derrick Deverill. He has told you of it, of course, for I know you have had meetings lately—and correspondence to no end—but I am not jealous; not the very least little bit.”

Honor had looked up for one lightning moment during the delivery of this speech. It was at the mention of Derrick’s name. Then her eyes fell again, and her shapely hand kept stroking the soft fur of the animal which lay stretched so luxuriously upon her lap. That she was doing so mechanically—that heart, blood, brain were all in one mad, dizzy, sickening whirl—was not known to her visitor, who, if she had meant to surprise or wound, was bound to consider herself vanquished.

“When I say ‘engagement,’” went on Lady Kissie, striving to peer into her companion’s bent face, and angry that the waning of the autumn sunlight left it so provokingly in shadow—“when I say ‘engagement,’ I should explain that it is a very one-sided affair. He is bound to me until such time as I may choose to release him, but I am comparatively free, and may end the thing at any time I fancy. It came about capitally,” laughing affectedly, and fanning, though it was not at all warm—“I have never yet seen a man whom I could not bring to my feet, if allowed the proper chances. Well, Derrick came to stop with me at my villa, Lower Lea, and we *had* fun, I can assure you! He was leading an awfully fast life—quite reckless, in fact—and was making love to every pretty woman he met: so, for fear he should be caught, I snared him myself! Splendidly cleverly I managed it, one lovely starry night, when he had dined well, and drunk well, and all the rest of it! Men are always in a soft mood then: you can make them say or do anything at all you want; and, of course, it was very nice for a day or two, but then he went away, and we both cooled off to freezing point. Duchess of Mufton and Dolte would sound so much better than Mrs. Derrick Deverill; to say nothing of the fortune! But there is the Duke, staring up at this window from the road! Absurd old boy! he’s as spooney as ever he can be. And Lady Mog is beckoning me down, too; so good-bye, my dear. I’m obliged for your permission to remain a month or so at Nutley. The duke is so fond of sport” (he did not look at all like it), “and I’m very sorry you’re so silly as to

give away your Leicestershire property; though, after all, you *are* under obligations to Colonel Blount, and he's a good sort of man, no doubt, and his wife is a most charming person. Well, ta, ta! Say adieu for me to the old henwife below stairs, and to her daughter with the broad brogue!"

Not a word had Honor spoken during all this rambling speech. She sat while her guest sat, and rose when she did so, but not a syllable had her frozen lips framed, nor had any change come over her set face. Lady Kissie bustled out, no parting kiss this time, no laudatory word, or endearing caress. Honor was no longer worthy of consideration in her eyes; no longer the heiress, to be flattered and cajoled and made many uses of—only the poor country girl, infatuated about a penniless estate, and not available for any sycophant airs. Down she went, her high heels clattering noisily on the little bare staircase, and passed out through the wicket, where her friends were waiting for her, without even so much as a glance at the good dame or her admiring daughter, who were curtseying dumbly by the kitchen door.

Sheelah could stand it no longer. She rushed upstairs, full of reproaches for Honor, because she had not descended with the lovely lady, and given them a further opportunity for feasting their eyes upon her splendours. But anger died from her heart when she beheld her young foster-sister, crouched low upon the floor, her face white and set, her hands clasping the window-frame against which she leaned. She rose up at once, however, and stretched far out through the lattice, gasping for air.

"I am not ill, only a little faint," she answered, in reply to Sheelah's eager questionings. "You know how I love to be left alone when not quite myself; so leave me, and come again by-and-by."

But Sheelah lingered, and, pausing by the table, her eye lighted upon the neatly-sealed letter which Honor had written to Derrick an hour or so before.

"Is this for post?" she asked, holding it up by the corner, but honourably refraining from looking at the address. "Let me take it; the walk to the village will do me good."

"Nay, it is not to go," answered Honor, in a faint and hollow voice. "Ah me! how heavily the air weighs to-day!"

CHAPTER XLII.

OCTOBER had come, full of beauty as of breezes; not wet, or windy, or chill with the promise of cold, bleak days in store; not travelling forward with heavy, audible strides, but treading with noiseless footsteps: creeping, as it were, on velvet feet, as though unwilling to break the soft slumber of the sweet gone summer, laid to everlasting sleep.

The weather was bright and bracing, full of pleasant inducements to tempt the healthy abroad, and sufficiently mild to make even the sick forget that the season most trying to them was nigh at hand.

Round about Nutley the country was looking most beautiful. The trees, yet unstripped in many places of their russet foliage, formed a gently waving forest of gold and brown. Every avenue and winding lane was carpeted lusciously with sweet-smelling leaves; every rivulet and mountain-stream was running clear as crystal; the hedgerows were ripe with blackberries—bushels of them, yet ungathered—hanging like clusters of shining jet upon the still leafy hedges; while, in the meadows, and far, far away, as far as the eye could reach, an abundant crop of after-grass afforded rich and pleasant pasturage for the sheep, scattered here and there in snowy flocks, and for “the cattle upon a thousand hills.”

Within doors at the Grange things were apparently as quiet and peaceful as they were without. Below stairs, in the servants’ hall, many of the old, faithful retainers—banished for awhile by Colonel Blount—were in their former places, reinstalled by the beloved young mistress in whose service they would have lived and died, and, although inwardly wrath at the presence of some of the company then resident at the house, they were all nevertheless ready at any time to cast an aspersion upon the truth of Lady Kissie’s announcement, that not one of them would be content to work without wages, and that the place must in consequence be suffered to fall into decay

In the library her ladyship herself was luxuriously lying : propped up upon a couch, a fur rug spread carefully over her, a morning gown of cherry-coloured satin, befrilled with soft laces at throat and wrist, showing sweetly above the warm coverings in which she was enveloped ; her fingers heavy with diamonds, gifts from His Grace of Mufton and Dolte ; her hair carelessly yet most becomingly arranged, and (carefully concealed beneath the shelter of the fur rug) a large and thoroughly unromantic poultice of bread and water bound securely about her left ankle.

The truth was, the beauty was a sufferer—an invalid—a sad grumbler at Fate, which had sent her an accident at a quiet country place, where there were not any Bath-chairs to pose in, or admiring multitudes to sympathise with they knew not what. A grumbler she had indeed been from the day before, when she had ventured out to hunt, for the first time in her life—although declaring that she was an adept at it—and had, as though in punishment for so daring a violation of the truth, tumbled off her horse at the very first fence—a mere little cutting, by the way—and had contrived to sprain her pretty ankle, and to sustain some other damages as well ; the consequence of which catastrophe was, that she had been brought home in tears and tatters by the duke, her escort—who, it may be here observed, never saw much of a run himself, and was not particularly sorry to find an excuse for turning homeward at the first rush following the “tally-ho !”—being, indeed, rather accustomed to lose a shoe in such emergencies, or to fancy his mount was over-weighted, or to find that “that confounded groom” had left the girths too loose, or had drawn the throat-lash too tight, or had bitten the animal wrongly, or had put the saddle too far forward or too far back, or been guilty of some other enormity, which compelled his sport-loving master to turn homewards at a time when other men were catching hold of their horses’ heads—and consequently caused threats of his (the offending groom’s) instant dismissal.

Lady Kissie had not confessed, nor she would have done so for the world, the real state of affairs with regard to herself. She had, on the contrary, derived consolation from declaring that her steed had shied at a worrying wrecker, who had been stationed in the way with his pitchfork and rope, and that such a thing as a fall in the hunting-field had never happened to her in all her life before—which, to do her justice, was not any infringement of the truth.

In the study, the special snuggery of the late lamented owner of Nutley Grange, and leaning lazily against the very *escritoire* in which papers of such importance to Honor had been unearthed from their concealment by Mr. Jessel's subtil hand, was His Grace of Mufton and Dolte, dressed in an elegant *négligé* suit of coffee-coloured velvet, and smoking a very fragrant cigar. A pleasant smile was upon his ducal visage, and, could his thoughts have been read, they would have been found to run thus:—

“Well, it's done, and she's a pretty little thing; but, by Jove, I hope she has as much of the needful as people have told me, for I'm hard up, and only for my luck in getting a chance of stopping on in this hole of a place (which saves money, and gives a man time to look about him), I should have come to some confounded smash ere this. However, it's clear she has lots of tin, and I can manage by negotiating a bill or two to stave off my coufounded creditors until I get hold of it—and won't I spend it right royally then! I wonder does she fancy I am rich? I suppose she does. Bah! it is well, in more ways than one, that women are so trustful.”

In an upper chamber, intent upon looking over and arranging a boxful of uninteresting papers—receipts for money paid, applications for money due, entreaties for money not due, acknowledgments for money charitably given, directions for the profitable investment of money, and announcements of sundry money failures and speculations—together with heaps of old letters, ledgers, and documents of various kinds—Honor was quietly seated, her young face drawn into lines of peculiar gravity, and a puzzled, depressed look upon it, as though she knew not what was to come out of the tangle of filed and crumpled and time-discoloured pieces of writing and printed matter upon which all her attention was for the while centred. She had spent her entire morning in the arrangement of sundry household duties—difficult enough, heaven knows, owing to the seemingly hopeless mesh in which everything had got entangled during the recent *ménage*, but easy in comparison with this more trying task of singling out things which had concerned her father only, and placing them apart from others to which her later guardian might rightfully lay claim.

She was dressed in deepest black; a cold, wan pallor was over every feature; while around her heavy eyes dark tell-tale circles revealed a story of watching, or of care.

Presently she paused, listened, as the sound of her own name caught her ear, and, springing hurriedly up, crossed a narrow landing and entered a partially-darkened room. To any one coming into it from the broad glare of day, it would have seemed wholly dark.

"Is that my precious?" said an anxious voice from the bed; and Honor, conscious to whom the endearing term applied, answered with studied cheerfulness that it was. "I want the light let in," said the voice, which sounded very hollow and weak. "I cannot sleep, and I love the day so dearly! I know you only shut it out in the mornings in order that I may get rest; but I want it very badly now—the darkness is so *cold*."

Honor drew back the curtain and raised the blind, admitting the soft grey light of the October day. It fell upon her own calm, sorrowful face, and upon that of the wasted figure upon the bed. Bet! but Bet so changed by sickness that even those who knew and loved her best could trace but few marks of resemblance between her, as she now appeared, and the jovial, quizzical, whimsical, eccentric, yet wholly kind and sympathetic creature, who would have sacrificed her own life for one she loved, and who had indeed done so for the benefit of the orphan girl on whom she had set her heart—crushed and broken as it had long been, yet ever unselfishly striving to conceal its wreck.

"Come and kiss me, my pretty," she said to Honor, and twined her loving arms about her neck. "You are not to fret or be troubled, for I feel wonderfully better to-day, and am less drowsy, though I have slept so little all night. I kept watching the flickering of the bonfires on the hills yonder, and laughing quietly to myself to think that they had been lighted, and were still burning, in honour of *my* Honor's coming home; and every word, too, of that address presented to you, kept dancing in diamond letters before my eyes. Come, you must not hide your face upon my pillow; I can't see you when you do that; and what is this that you are saying about having me to thank for it all? No such thing; not a bit of it! Thank Derrick. I could have done nothing but for him—nor could either of us have done much, if anything, without Mr. Jessel: so, you see, I am entitled to very little gratitude. Now, I want to know what time it is?"

Honor glanced at her watch. It was the half-hour after noon,

"Oh, dear! is that all? I wish it was four o'clock!" sighed Bet. "Call me a little before—at half-past three—should I be asleep. I am growing drowsy again. And, Honor dearie, I want you to put on your pretty velvet frock, and to look your best and brightest. Will you, dear?"

"Anything you like," murmured Honor, caressing her. "But why, Bet—tell me—why am I to put on the velvet frock?"

"Oh, because," said Bet, moving her restless head upon the pillow, and tossing back her heavy hair; "because he—I mean I—like you so much in anything that is dark and soft. Are you quite sure it is only half-past twelve?"

"Quite sure, dear one. See my watch."

"And there is not any mistake about this being Thursday—is there?" she anxiously asked.

"No, my darling, none! Don't you recollect it was the day before yesterday that you insisted upon being brought over from Nest Farm, because I was coming here—and got so thrown back by it that you were very ill indeed all yesterday, and only brightened up towards the evening, when the tar-barrels were lighted and the serenading began."

"Yes, I remember," murmured the sick girl; "and Mr. Jessel lifted me up in his arms, that I might see the fun. This *is* Thursday, sure enough—but I wish it was later in the day! *What* is that?" she inquired, with a shrinking face, as a noisy laugh came up from below and seemed to strike her like an unwholesome wind, "I don't like it. What is it?"

Honor went to the door and closed it quietly, with a hasty hand.

"It is only Lady Kissie," she replied: "she does not remember, dear, how ill you are, not having seen you, as I have; and, were it not that it annoys you, I should be glad to hear her laugh. She has been in great pain, she says, all night."

"Great fiddle-de-dee!" exclaimed Bet, with a touch of her old humour. "If there was a dance to be had this evening, even though it were in a barn, she'd contrive to shake loose her bandages, and be off to it! Why on earth don't they go away?"

"Lady Mog has gone, dear," responded Honor, after a hesitating pause. "She went, you know, before we came over here; in fact, last week."

"Yes, but why don't the others go? You never invited them, and I am sure you are not asking them to stay."

"No, dear; I have no wish at all that they should remain;

but they have not yet talked of leaving, and it would be inhospitable of me—especially in the first days of my ownership—to suggest, or even to hint at, their doing so.”

“Well, I call it mean!” said Bet, with more energy than had for days characterised her speech; and, turning over on her side, declared that she thought she could fall asleep.

It was nearly four hours later, and Honor had just risen from the afternoon tea-table—at which she had been presiding for the benefit of the still reclining beauty and her ducal adorer—when the old butler, who had known his young mistress from a child, and had refused to take any other service when dismissed by Colonel Blount—appeared in the doorway, and, beckoning her mysteriously out, informed her in a whisper that Major Deverill had driven over from Mr. Jessel’s house, and was waiting to speak with her in the study.

Only pausing for an instant, to calm the agitation consequent upon so sudden an announcement, Honor went at once. She had put on the black velvet in deference to Bet’s expressed desire, and looked more than usually beautiful, her pale complexion being set off to advantage by its soft and sweeping folds.

Derrick, who was standing facing the window when she came in, turned quickly, and, meeting her without constraint, congratulated her warmly upon her restoration to her former happy home.

“For which I have, in large measure, to thank you,” she answered, gravely and quietly. “Nay, you need not shake your head: we shall have to speak more fully upon the subject by-and-by. For the present, let it rest. We—that is, I and my guests—have lunched and tea-ed, but I can have some refreshment brought to you in a moment.”

He waved his hand in dissent.

“No: do not trouble; Jessel has provided most generously for all my wants. I am anxious to know about Bet. She must be very ill, or she would not have written for me to come.”

“She *is* very ill, but I had not any idea that she had sent for you. When did she write?”

“A week ago—from Nest Farm—but I could not at once get leave. I telegraphed to her, on Monday last, that I should be here to-day. Shall I find her much changed?”

“Very much. You will scarcely recognise her; and yet, at times, she is wonderfully like her old self. Poor girl! she has sacrificed her life to her love for me. Draughts and exposure

in the hospital, during my unfortunate sickness, sowed the seeds of what a double sea-voyage (undertaken at a critical turn of her disease) has brought to bitter fruit. She has come home to die."

There were no tears in Honor's voice, or any traces of them in her serious, wistful eyes, round which those heavy circles were so tellingly drawn. The days of her weeping for Bet—if, indeed, there had ever been such—were ended. She was waiting now, with a great gloom upon her heart—waiting God's own time till "the corner at Nutley" should be vacant, and "the spot in the old churchyard" receive the tired wayfarer to her rest.

There was a painful silence, which lasted for several moments. Deverill sat motionless upon the couch, his head bent upon his hands, his eyes upon the carpet, his fingers thrust disconsolately through his hair—the very picture of regret.

Honor came quietly, and sat down by his side. She had never done so since the days of their too brief courtship, and, as though the action reminded him of pleasures past, Derrick shivered a little, and his head sank lower than before.

"Do you know," said Honor, speaking in a low and reverent voice, as though her thoughts were still busy with the subject of her sick friend, "do you know that, although she has never told me, I think—and am sure—that she loves *you* very dearly. I am glad to think it—I shall always be glad to have thought it, for it has been a link between her and me. I think she loves *me* for your sake, as well as for my own; I think she hungered and thirsted for my restoration here, because she knew it would be a source of rejoicing to you, as to me. I think that, when she dies, our two names will be engraven on her heart, where of late she has worn my picture, and where, for long—oh, I know it without ever having seen!—she has worn yours."

Silence again—deeper than before; Derrick not uttering a word: only writhing his head, as though in physical pain.

"Do you remember," went on Honor, speaking in the same calm tone, and gazing forwards into the space before her, with a wistful, far-off look in her haggard eyes, "when you and I talked together—long ago, it seems—in the library at Colonel Blount's house, and you told me what a splendid creature she once was, and how you and she had loved one another—or pretended, you said, to do so? Well, I think that on her side it was not all pretence; I think she gave you her whole true heart, and that it was the grief of losing you, and the dread of being

compelled to bestow herself elsewhere, that made her what she was when you found her, as you told me you did, with mop and dust-pan in her hands, on your return from abroad."

Deverill looked up, white and frowning; not as though he resented the gentle murmuring of the voice by his side, but as though he scorned and was angry with himself.

"What do you tell me this for?" he asked, almost fiercely. "Is it to show me what a brute I have been, to add to the torments of my self-reproach?"

"No," she replied. "It is because her sending for you has puzzled me; because I thought you ought to know—if, indeed, you did not know already—something of what her feeling towards you has always been: lest in the event of any word of hers now revealing it, you should be taken unawares, and so, perhaps, cause her pain. Adieu, for a while; I am going to see whether she is yet awake."

And, moving from his side with a noiseless step, she gained the door, and disappeared by it from the gaze of the yearning eyes which followed her as she went.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DERRICK got up when left alone, and began to pace the room, with a gloomy and puzzled brow.

"What a profound mystery," he thought, "are these two things—life and death. In a few hours either this feverish and wayward spirit will be at rest for ever, or will have commenced a new career in an untried existence; in a few hours, among the very heavens—a part of their own glory, a new link in a new order of beings, breathing amid the elements of another world, arrayed in the attributes of a diviner nature, a wanderer amongst the planets, an associate of angels, a beholder of the arcana of the great God: redeemed, regenerate, immortal, or—dust! There is no *Œdipus* to solve the enigma of life. We are—whence came we? We are not—whither do we go? All things *in* our existence have their object; existence has none! We ask the past its moral, we question the reason of our being, yet can gain no answer—no reward for our research. Is it merely to pant beneath this weary load; to sicken of the sun; to grow old; to drop like leaves into the grave, and bequeath to our heirs the worn garments of toil that we leave behind? Is it to sail for ever on the same sea, feeding its waves with new wrecks, or——"

He paused, blinded and bewildered. HONOR was by his side, gazing in timid wonder at his perturbed and passionate face.

"Well?" he said, looking at her in half-scared fashion, as though aroused from a dream.

The girl shook her head.

"You cannot see Bet. She is sleeping, and I dare not awake her. But you are not in a hurry, you will stop for dinner; and by-and-by perhaps she will wake up of her own accord, and then——"

"No," he hurriedly interrupted, "I cannot remain. You have a guest whom I should not care to meet."

"You mean Lady Kissie?"

He bent his head with sullen gesture.

"And yet—and yet"—murmured Honor, interlacing her slender fingers, as though a nervous agony were upon her which she could not keep still—"you were willing to marry her a few short weeks ago!"

"I never was," he bluntly answered.

"Well, you would have done so, had she not engaged herself to somebody else."

"Yes, I certainly should," he replied, still in the same short way "It is scarcely in me, I fancy, to act unfairly by a woman to whom I have made a promise, even though it may have been wrung from me by unfair means. *They* can do as they please with *me*, of course; but chivalry, knightliness, *manliness*, what you will, binds me to them, so long as they do not cast me off—which," he added, with a laugh more bitter than gall, "two have lately done."

"I hope you do not class them in the same category," said Honor, in a low tone of pain.

"No, scarcely that," he replied. "One decoyed me on for vanity's sake, and before I knew or cared where I was or what I was doing, I had drifted into the toils. The other"—and his voice grew softer as he spoke—"suffered me to win her, and then, through a mistaken impulse, cast me adrift, to be——"

"You might have spared me this!" wailed Honor, turning aside her face from his, which was dark with passionate and bitter thought; "I can swear before dear heaven——"

His hand grasped hers—for the first time, save in conventional greeting, since the night of their betrothal.

"Swear nothing," he said. "I know all you would say; but, for the sake of that 'dear heaven' which was just now upon your lips, when you win the honest love of some other man, don't, 'for his sake' or 'for his good,' cut the only cord that binds him to a pure and honourable life, and send him from the gate of heaven to find his way down, down, to the companionship of—well, never mind; I did not mean to pain you," and he pressed a mad, passionate kiss upon the hand he held. "Forgive me, and try, as I must, to forget!"

Then, walking in a blind, purposeless way to the door, he put his hand to his forehead, and said,

"I meant to have returned to Dublin this evening, for my leave is short, but I cannot go without seeing Bet. I shall

sleep at Jessel's to-night, and come over here early in the morning. I trust she may be better then. Good-bye."

Despite the concluding phrase, he lingered an instant, irresolute, as though about to turn back; the next he was gone.

That night Bet grew so perceptibly worse that Honor remained up with her all through the long hours, assisted in her labours by Mrs. Nest, who came over from the farm to share her vigil. With daylight Sheelah also appeared, and the change in the sick girl's condition showing no signs of improvement, Honor despatched her foster-sister to the old butler to get a horse harnessed at once, and drive over to the telegraph-office with a summons for Colonel Blount, who was then with his wife at Knotty Cross; and also to fetch Dr. Jones without delay. This done, she again took up her station beside the bed, and holding one of the fevered hands, which were tossing the coverings about with that terribly restless disquietude which so often precedes death, she laid her face beside the sadly altered one upon the pillow, and whispered from time to time such words as only lips pure as hers dare utter.

As the morning advanced, Bet rallied a little, spoke cheerily to those about her, thanked Mrs. Nest and Sheelah for their attentions, told Dr. Jones when he came that he had done his best to keep her alive, but that her day was over, and she was tired, and was glad to go—now that she had seen her sweet girl in her own bright home again. Even for Lady Kissie she had a pleasant word, when the startled beauty, awed and horror-stricken at the near approach of the dread destroyer, came limping in to see whether or not she had heard an aggravated statement with regard to the patient's condition.

Then a telegram arrived from Colonel Blount. He would start at once, catch the mail at Euston at 8.20, be in Dublin at 7 A.M. next morning, and take the first train for Galway, reaching Nutley, in all probability, shortly after three o'clock. This was the quickest he could travel, but it was a question whether that worn body would retain its life for the twenty-eight hours which should elapse before the darkly cruel man could stand by the bedside of the daughter who had for years endured his tyrannies without a murmur, and who had shown him, unworthy though he was, the filial reverence and devotion which only the good deserve.

At noon Mr. Jessel and Derrick drove over, The former did

not go up. Fearful of exhausting the patient's little remaining strength, he stayed for an hour or so below stairs, in company with Lady Kissie and her depressed adorer, anxiously awaiting bulletins, and taking pressure off the household by seeing and answering all inquirers : for it soon became known in the village that a great sorrow was about to fall upon the beloved young owner of Nutley Grange, and many a sympathising heart beat in unison with her affliction.

Bet's restlessness visibly abated when she heard that Derrick had come ; and bidding Mrs. Nest go to fetch him, and not return for a while herself, she lay watching the door with anxious, yearning eyes—while Honor, with shaded face, sat in silence by her pillow, and waited also for his coming.

Bet raised herself when he entered, and joyfully extended her hands. He clasped them without a word, and sat down, as she directed him, opposite the seat which Honor occupied. Then she gave a hand to each, and looked from one to the other with such unutterable fondness as no face had ever worn before. Such love in her earnest eyes ; such light on her wasted cheek ; such smiles upon her feeble quivering lips—and withal, such a touch of the old quaint humour struggling to show itself over the poor wan face.

“A pair of children!” she said, shaking her head until her rich hair tumbled in profusion about her neck—“babies! dolls! infants! playing at cross-purposes so long that it seemed as though the straight road was never to be found. I thought, when I made it up between ye the first time, that it surely ought to have been enough—but no ; my dear girl here should raise up an imaginary cross for me to smooth over. Then, as if that was not sufficient, my difficult boy *here* should raise up a real one, which could never have been smoothed at all if Fate had not befriended him. Ah, me! children both ; nothing else! nothing else!”

Here her weakness interrupted her, and she lay back, whilst Honor—hurriedly rising—hastened to bathe her hands and face, and pillowed her head upon her own sorrowing bosom.

When she next spoke, which was not for a considerable time, it was clear that her mind had wandered in the interval to other matters. She murmured short sentences about her father—about various things in which she was interested, or had been engaged—and, straying still further back, whispered broken words about their life in India, and clung to Derrick's hand, and

uttered his name, as though he were in some way or other closely associated in her thoughts with that time.

He leaned earnestly forward for a moment, and spoke to her.

"Bet, you have never reproached me, but I reproach myself. You can understand what I say, can follow me, can you not?—nor have we any secrets from Honor, you and I. She heard from me, months ago, that we had met abroad and had (shall I say it?) played at lovers for our amusement—as, honestly, I then thought it was. Can you forgive me, my poor girl?"

She roused herself, and tried to laugh.

"Forgive? Oh, yes! that was done long ago. I have never thought about myself, had no care at all except for your happiness. You *will* be happy with my darling—my sweet girl? I trust her to you, and you to her. You have not 'played at lovers' with my stately Honor; you gave her your whole heart—as she gave you hers. You will take care of her, Derrick, to your life's end?"

He was not ashamed to lay his bowed head upon the coverlet, and let his tears gush forth, as he answered, brokenly,

"What hand and life can; if she will allow me."

With a smile of heavenly composure upon her face, the dying girl clasped the fingers with which he was veiling his grief, and, drawing them close to her breast, took Honor's hand also, and united the two with her own feeble yet loving grasp. They could not resist her then, even had there been a wish to do so—which there was not—and, holding them thus, she fell asleep.

All through the succeeding hours she slumbered on, or woke at intervals to whisper brokenly of the joy and peacefulness that were in her heart, or to lay her lips upon the soft young arm which remained cast lovingly about her neck. Sometimes she spoke of seeing a light, which had seemed at first a great way off, but was drawing nearer and nearer, until it was then quite nigh.

"Could you not lift me over to it?" she now and again whispered, "or stretch for it that it may fall full upon me, and not leave me in the shadow!" And they told her then that the light was coming fast—very fast!

"It is so dark," she presently murmured, "I can scarcely see; and I cannot reach forward to draw it to me. Can you not bring it nearer, my sweet girl?"

Sometimes she slept, or seemed to do so, for an hour or more together—and then Derrick would get up and walk to the

window, and lean thoughtfully upon the sash, gazing out upon the unwavering trees, as calm and still as the death-chamber in which he and his betrothed were the voiceless watchers. Then she would call feebly to him to come to her again, and would once more clasp his hand with Honor's, and bid him cherish her darling as she deserved.

She murmured ceaselessly about the light, as though she were groping in darkness: sometimes saying that it was far off, and again that it was almost nigh, and praying touchingly to them to bring it closer.

Once, too, when she kissed Honor, she asked that Derrick might kiss her also, and, when he did, two hot tears—the first—stole from under her closed eyelids, and were wiped away by Honor's pitying hand.

Then she slept again, so peacefully that they held their breaths that they might not wake her—and so the day waned.

Towards evening, just as the sun was going down, she awoke; laid her cheek for an instant against that of her unwearying watcher, and stretching a yearning hand, as though her eyes saw something which others could not see, said that the light had come at last—and so died.

In "the quiet corner at Nutley" poor Bet found rest; and "in the spot in the old churchyard" they laid her down, close beside that other grave in which so large a part of Honor's young heart lay buried. Colonel Blount—late to see his daughter die—attended the funeral, which was a large one, for all the tenantry assembled; and Mr. Jessel and Derrick carried the light coffin to its resting-place, while the father of her who slept within it walked grimly in the rear, with Honor's black-gloved hand upon his arm. In the presence of death all feuds are forgotten: and unmindful of former things—of everything, as she had said, except that she once loved him—the young mistress of Nutley bade the best chamber be made ready for him, her guest, and laid a gentle finger upon his lips when he awkwardly strove to say that he was remorseful for the past.

Are such women rare? Ay, for God usually calls them young: but He spared this one of whom I have written to see her happy children about her, and to shed her own true light upon many an otherwise darkened and melancholy home.

Lady Kissie became in due time Duchess of Mufton and Dolte, and had the satisfaction of discovering that a high-sound-

ing title was in reality all that her lord had to bestow upon her, for his debts were many, and his ways of meeting them few. His Grace was in like manner disappointed; but consoled himself with the reflection that he had at all events married a most charming woman, who seemed quite capable of living by her wits, and of assisting him to do likewise—which she certainly was—and did: to the great admiration of her associates.

Mr. Jessel never married. He gradually grew less grave, however—mixed more freely with those about him, and became what is known in every town and village as “a good-natured man.” Mrs. Tenterden Jones’s parties were organized by him; the little doctor’s stud was replenished; the three young ladies’ money-boxes were constantly filled; and when, in course of time, Sheelah Nest consented to marry the jovial young blacksmith, whose anvil had made such music for Honor at Nest Farm, Mr. Jessel gave the bride to her blithe young bridegroom, and smoked his evening pipe in the dame’s kitchen, that she might not feel lonely when the young couple went away.

At Nutley he was at all times a welcome guest, though never an intruder; and when Derrick gave up soldiering, and adopted a country life, the two men cemented the friendship which had been so strangely begun, and helped one another in every undertaking with a zeal and goodwill born of an honest regard.

With Honor, when in his presence, there was ever, as was natural, a certain shyness and constraint—only to be melted when she went with him, as she sometimes did, to see how untiringly he tended the graves so very dear to her, and to adorn them with flowers.

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